SHORT STORIES

No. 777.] Week ending November 21, 1903. [Price One Penny.

WHAT AWFUL SIGHT IS THAT SHE SEES?

(A Very Thrilling Incident from "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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The purest and most efficient Remedy procurable for
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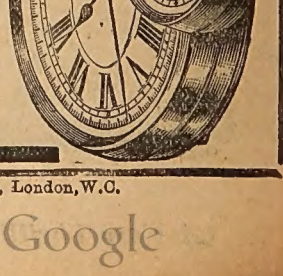

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 777.] Week Ending November 21st, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series.

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no son.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the Baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and she then took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the race-course, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who informed Sara that a reward of £100 was offered for her arrest.

She just managed to run away from him, but underwent another perilous adventure before the day was out.

Her only plan was to disguise herself so as to escape recognition, and this she managed successfully to do.

She received a telegram from Maggie Dunkley, telling her that Noel had arrived in Northampton, and would be with Sara the following day.

Miss Gillespie went to the appointed meeting-place—the canal; but Noel was very late, and Sara, fearing a trap, got on board a barge.

Imagine her horror when she found herself confronted by—Sidney Ilford! She was gagged and bound, in the power of Templeton and Co.!

Presently Noel appeared on the bank in search of Sara. He boarded the barge, but Ilford lied discreetly.

Sara's agony became too great to bear, for *Noel was about to leave!*

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A HOUSE OF MYSTERY IN BIRMINGHAM.

THE moments of suspense that followed! For a moment a faint hope flickered that even at the last Noel would turn back to save me, and then the echo of his footsteps died away, and my heart sickened within me at the thought that he had gone.

He, my lover, had left me to the tender mercies of his enemies. The knowledge stunned me like a blow; I fell back almost fainting; my heart beat heavily, painfully, there came a horrible dryness in my mouth, my tongue was parched. I lay helpless as a log, all feeling, all emotion, numbed.

Since the evening of my flight from London I had suffered danger, anxiety, pain; but through it all I had been buoyed up by the hope of re-union with Noel, my courage had not left me, nor my endurance flagged until this moment, when it seemed my lover had abandoned me. To be in sight, in hearing, in reach of the woman he loved, and not to know that she was there! In my despair I was ready to judge him harshly, unkindly, yet all the time my heart was crying out for him. Noel, Noel! How I craved for his voice and touch!

After a while I was roused from my state of stupor. Opening my eyes I beheld Sidney Ilford bending over me.

"You're faint," he said, and looped back the awning, so that the fresh air might fan my face. He placed a cushion under my head, and presently reappeared with a cup of tea.

"You're just about done for," he said quietly. And then, "You had better listen to me and act reasonably. It isn't to be supposed I entertain very kindly feelings towards you, considering you've done your best to kill me. All the same, I don't want a dead body on my hands, and as things are now you look uncommonly like pegging out. You're white as death, except where you're pale green. If you'll undertake to keep quiet, not to shout or scream, or play me any tricks, I'll untie those ropes and let you walk about a bit; also I'll let you take a cup of tea. Now, do you agree?" I signed consent, and stooping down, he deftly slipped the gag out of my mouth.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked in a wild, trembling sort of voice.

"Uncertain. You'll be handed over to Templeton sometime to-night, but for the next two or three hours you'll be here in my charge. If you'll give me your word not to try to escape, or to play up any of your dodges, as I said before, I'll untie you."

Aching in every limb, bruised in spirit, sick at heart, I was too weak to combat his offer. One stipulation I made, however:

"I'll be quiet for half an hour," I said. "That is to say, I won't call out or try to jump overboard myself, or to push you. At the expiration of that time my promise ends. I shall——"

"You'll be tied up again, my dear," he said facetiously. "I shouldn't let you go now if you did not look half dead."

I suppose I looked almost as bad as I felt, and Ilford, as I had already discovered, was essentially a coward. If I were to die upon the barge, it would be awkward for him!

Free from my bonds, I crept to the end of the barge, and watched the flat shores on either side with wide, despairing eyes. Through the grey light of the closing day the trees loomed ghastly and forlorn. The cries of the town in the distance came strange and hollow over the water. The horse plodding steadily along the towpath drew the barge slowly, monotonously on its course. We had reached a long stretch of the canal, there was not a lock in sight.

Ilford, seated at a convenient distance, near enough to watch my every movement, yet not so near as to endanger his safety should I break my word and attack him, smoked a pipe of peace. The boy lounged at the end, and lazily whistled an old tune. To all appearances we were a happy, peaceful trio, content with ourselves and our surroundings.

To my surprise, Sidney Ilford made no mention of the notes. I feared a cross-examination, or, worse still, an attempt to force them from my possession. He did not, however, refer to them, but smoked in silent satisfaction, casting quick glances in my direction every now and then.

I realised afterwards that my surmise as to the reason for his conduct was correct. The advent of Noel had startled him. For the first time, the possibility of the accomplished gang of scoundrels, of which he was a member, being brought to justice had occurred to him. He decided to minimise his chances of conviction, and to take no active part in my ill-treatment. He would deliver me into Templeton's hands, and then, his task concluded, could claim his portion of the spoil afforded by my capture with a light heart.

Across the water came the booming of church bells. It was half-past six—in another quarter of an hour my period of liberty would end. I must then decide on my course of action; I must either remain a prisoner on parole or make a bold attempt for freedom.

The rope that linked the barge to the patient beast of burden on the towpath creaked and groaned with the strain. If the rope should snap! The thought darted through my mind, bringing in its train a scheme, daring, and yet, it seemed to me, feasible.

If I could sever the rope, so that at any given moment the barge could be brought to a standstill, it would be a step towards my escape. Ilford and the boy would at once rush to see what had happened, leaving me free to—— I glanced down at the water with a shudder. Freedom to drown would be all that I should gain, it seemed to me.

And yet the water was not so very deep, nor the banks so very far away. The barge left to its own sweet way—the boy had ceased to manipulate the rudder—seemed steering for the right bank. I should be able, if its course were not altered, to jump to the shore. At any rate, it would be worth attempting. Even if I did not succeed in making my escape, I should at all events throw out the calculations of the firm. The barge might remain stranded for hours and hours, while Templeton fumed and fretted at the appointed place.

The rope was knotted round a short, thick post, heavy with tar, hard with exposure. It felt like iron to my slender strength; nevertheless I plucked at it, easing the knot with fingers that trembled with weakness and fear. As for my promise—well, I had given my word neither to call for help nor to jump into the water, further than that I had not gone.

Ilford, grown sentimental in the twilight, had fallen to singing a love song, the boy suiting his whistle to accompany him. Leaning on a pile of cushions the elegant Sidney flourished his cigarette, and smiled expansively. Neither he nor the urchin thought the forlorn-looking girl huddled by the rudder was even then contemplating her escape.

The rope yielded a little to my pressure, my fingers, aching with the task, knitted themselves about the heavy strands. With many a creak and groan the knot untwisted, the end at last lay loose between my fingers.

Shaking, I leant forward, my heart in my throat, waiting for some neighbouring church to sound the hour of my release. At last the welcome strokes fell on my ear. A sweet-toned chime announced the half hour over. It was a quarter to the hour.

Ilford, as well aware as I that the period for which I had pledged myself was over, glanced curiously in my direction. I rose quietly to my feet, letting the rope trail slowly through my fingers. Just as the end touched the water, a sudden shock thrilled the barge from end to end. There was grinding sound, and then——

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"We've stuck!" shouted Ilford, and rushing to where I stood, stooped, thinking to grasp the rope. The barge, deprived of its impetus, had grounded on a mud bank close to the shore. By the time Ilford had grasped the fact that he was out loose from his horse, I had put my project into execution. Running the length of the craft I poised myself a moment on the stern, then sheltered from view by the tarpaulin, took a flying leap into the dark.

My feet slipped on a sloping bank. I had almost fallen back into the water when, throwing myself forward, I felt the grip of a strong hand.

"Now, then, my good woman, hold tight or you'll be in the water. Hullo! What's this?" and my interlocutor held up my iron-grey wig, half dangling down my back.

"Why, bless my soul, it's a girl! What on earth are you doing, my dear? Here, hold up a second; you'll be over!"

Giddy and dazed, I clung to him, and was half dragged, half carried to a safe distance from the water side.

At this moment there rose shouts from the barge. Ilford's voice, hoarse with rage, screamed out my name.

"She's a thief," he shouted. "Hold her till I get ashore. I tell you she's a thief!"

He ran frantically to and fro seeking the point nearest the shore. He was too great a coward to leap as I had done If I could induce this stranger to help I might get away before the craven found courage to face the jump.

"Are you a thief?" said the man bluntly.

"No, no," I answered. "It isn't true, indeed it isn't true. The men on board that barge—two men against a girl—want to keep me prisoner because I know certain things—bad things about them. You are so strong."

I glanced wistfully at his sturdy frame.

"Surely you'll help me. If not——" I turned towards the canal. "One can only die once," I murmured, and ran a step or two towards the water.

In a second his fingers tightened round my wrist.

"Nothing of the sort," he said sharply. "Whether you're lying or no, remains to be proved; for the present you'll come along with me."

Still keeping me prisoner, he led the way across a patch of market gardens, up a lane to the front of a large, well-built house.

The door stood open; I accompanied my host into a cheery sitting-room, where blazed a fire, in front of which there stood a table set for tea.

In answer to his summons a respectable-looking woman appeared, evidently his housekeeper.

"Give this girl some tea," he said brusquely, "and keep her here till I return."

"You are going——" I interrupted.

"To the canal, where I shall learn what those people on the barge have to say. I've heard your side of the story, I must listen to theirs."

"You won't tell them where I am?" I pleaded.

"Most certainly I shall, but"—he glanced at me narrowly—

New Street, Birmingham, where Sara arrived after escaping from her peril in Leicester.

Colmore Row, in which buildings the offices of Truscot Moran were situated.

"I shall not give you up without due warning. I shall come back shortly."

He left the room, locking the door behind him; I stood bewildered, gazing at the fire. Something arousing my attention, I glanced to the other side of the apartment, where hung a mirror on the wall. My own reflection greeted me; I started with surprise; no wonder the good man felt suspicious—never was so wild a figure seen out of an asylum!

My hair, loosened from its coil, hung limp about my shoulders, the rouge upon my cheeks showed up the whiteness of my face. My eyes, swollen and dark, protruded from my head. Add to that the grey wig that my host had rescued, and it will be readily understood that my appearance was not calculated to inspire confidence. I contrasted my haggard condition with Sidney Ilford's good looks and smiling manner, and concluded that judgment must inevitably go against me. When the master of the house returned he would hand me over to my captors, and all chance of my escape would be at an end!

I turned towards the housekeeper, who sat regarding me in stolid wonderment.

"Will you let me tidy myself?" I asked, "my hair looks dreadful," and I pointed to my dishevelled locks.

"You mustn't go out of the room," she said, "but you can put yourself straight here if you like."

Hastening to the glass, I managed to smooth my hair into order, and by dint of hard scrubbing removed most of the rouge from my face. Then I turned to the respectable person by the fire.

"What is your master's name?" I asked.

"John Wilson," she answered slowly. "He's a rich man and a just man, and——"

I interrupted her. "Do you know why he brought me here?" I asked. She made a sign of indifference. "I never question what he does," she answered. "He said you were to bide here till he came back, and"—she looked at me significantly—"here you'll stay."

I tried threats and pleading, besought and upbraided—in vain. Mr. John Wilson, it seemed, was master in his house, and his will was never questioned. Possibly he had a fancy for bringing waifs and strays to his hospitable hearth, perhaps—my cogitations were suddenly cut short.

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"Master's a justice of the Peace," said the housekeeper proudly. "He's got to inquire into the rights of things. Maybe"—she glanced at me critically—"maybe he found you trespassing?"

I denied the accusation vehemently, and forthwith plunged into a recital of the persecutions I had suffered from the hands of Templeton and Co. My story was interrupted by the return of Mr. Wilson—followed by Sidney Ilford.

With a desperate notion of self-defence, I grasped the poker and awaited their approach. Mr. Wilson took in the situation at a glance, and striding towards me, dispossessed me of my weapon before I knew what was going to happen.

"None of that," he said sharply, "you make the case against you look even blacker than before. This gentleman"—he motioned to Sidney—"declares you are a professional thief. He says you came aboard his barge this afternoon, disguised as an elderly woman, and asked if you might hide from some men who were pursuing you. He thought your tale strange, but in compassion for your agitation, allowed you to remain. Your subsequent conduct convinced him that your tale was false, and on observation, he recognised you as a clerk in the employ of his firm, a clerk who had embezzled money and stolen papers. Now"—he turned towards me severely—"now what have you to say?"

For a moment I hesitated, Sidney's story, with its cunning mixture of truth and falsehood, seemed impossible to disprove.

"What is your name?" said Mr. Wilson, prompted by Ilford.

"Sara Gillespie," I said desperately. Then, taking courage from the danger of my situation. "What that man told you is partly true, but most of his story is a lie."

Ilford started to his feet and commenced to whisper hurriedly in Wilson's ear.

As a result of his communication, the J.P. looked at me more sternly than before.

"Have you certain papers and bank notes in your possession that you took from the office of Templeton and Co., your late employers?"

"The papers had been obtained by false means. They—" He interrupted me.

"I want a direct answer to my question. We will go further into the matter later on. Have you certain papers and bank notes, which you took—rightly or wrongly—from the offices of Templeton and Co.?"

"I will not answer," I said defiantly; "do your worst, I will not answer."

"If you refuse, I shall be obliged—on this gentleman's application—to issue a warrant for your arrest. Be advised, Miss Gillespie, tell me the truth. You are young, and I am anxious, if possible, to spare you disgrace. Have you the papers?"

I looked up at him, intreaty in my eyes. Had I seen ever so slight a softening in his face, had I read anything of pity—or of belief in my statement, my course would have been different. Grim and stern, he stood before me, justice he would have, the justice that judges from appearances, and appearances were dead against me!

"I have not the notes, I have not the papers," I cried, flinging the lie like a challenge in his face.

"It's false! false!" cried Ilford.

"If you doubt my word," I said, "let me be searched, that woman"—I pointed to the housekeeper—"shall prove that what I say is true. Let her go with me to another room, and search me."

Ilford protested noisily at the suggestion, but Wilson impressed by my earnestness, decided that the request was reasonable. Obeying her master's instructions, the woman lit a candle, and preceded me across the hall up a wide oak staircase, thickly carpeted, and so into a bedroom, lofty, cold, and hung with dark and heavy curtains.

I managed to close the door without slipping the latch; my guide, out of breath, sat down on a chair, and signed to me to take off my coat as a preliminary to investigation.

"In a minute," I said, "I'm tired; the stairs are steep." As I spoke I moved a thick rug aside, and folding it over my arm, sat down on the ottoman it covered.

"My brooch has caught in my collar," I said, "please bring the light a little nearer."

Grumbling, the woman obeyed, and advanced towards me with the candle. With a quick breath I rose as she approached and, flinging the rug over her face and head, sent her staggering back. The candle went flying to the floor, she groped wildly in the darkness, calling in a voice muffled by the thickness of the rug. Softly I stole through the door, across the landing, gaining, with swift and silent speed, the hall, before the worthy housekeeper had found her voice.

With bated breath I rushed past the parlour where Ilford was still holding forth, and so through the big door—open—thank Heaven, and into the sweet-scented darkness of the night.

How the housekeeper fared, what Wilson said, and Sidney Ilford felt, I could only form a guess. If their consternation were as great as my relief, they must have been miserable indeed.

For some little while I did not trouble as to the direction in which I was going, my only aim being to increase the distance between Ilford and myself.

After a half hour's rapid walking, I judged it safe to make a pause, and, resting on a convenient stile, thought out my next move. Two courses lay open to me. I could either return to Leicester—to Mrs. Goodman's house by the canal—there to wait Noel's return, or press forward to some safe hiding-place, from which I could communicate with him.

The latter seemed to me the wiser plan. My return to Leicester would be attended with an amount of risk I did not feel able to bear. Templeton and Co. would surely have spies posted in readiness and I should probably be seized and captured long before I reached my goal. I would go to the next big town, the larger the place the more easy it would be to hide.

I selected Birmingham, and decided to start for that city early the next morning. Meantime I must find some place in which to pass the night. A sharp walk brought me to a nest of cottages, where, after some tiresome explanations, I succeeded in securing a room. The night passed without peril. Early the next day I was abroad and taking the train from the nearest station, some miles beyond Leicester, arrived at New Street, Birmingham, about mid-day.

And at Birmingham commenced one of the strangest chapters of my life.

The platform at which the train drew up was thronged. The sound of many feet, ceaseless and hurrying, filled the great station. I was overpowered by a sense of insignificance and unimportance. The feeling was intensified, when at the top of a long flight of steps, leading from the platform, I found myself on the foot-bridge that traverses the station. Leaning against the railings, I stood dazed and bewildered by the crowd. A never-ending stream of humanity, to left and right, the currents hurry by, no loitering, no indetermination, but purposeful and strong, the throng sweeps by; artisans and operatives, clerks and bookmakers, work girls and pleasure-seekers, a dense mass hurrying over.

The spectacle took my breath away; I had not thought so wonderful a sight could be. London, with its teeming millions, vast resources, could not show anything so great. An ever hastening throng, purposeful and full of life, some on a wedding journey, others answering the call of sickness or distress, others again running a race with time—treacherous and implacable.

At that hour of the day traffic on the foot-bridge was at its densest. I leant closer to the railings, dizzy with the sound and scent of humanity. At that moment, forcing his way through the throng, came a man-servant, his arms full of parcels, and grasping a heavy package in his left hand. Immediately behind, flustered and concerned, followed a middle-aged woman, whose opulent silks and velvets intensified the plebeian appearance of her red, good-natured face and large, ungraceful body.

The man was overloaded, the weight he carried overtaxed his temper and his strength. Turning to answer an injunction from the lady in velvet, he got wedged in the crowd, trying to

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free himself he stumbled and fell, and, falling, dropped a heavy package on my foot.

Crying out with the pain, instinctively I tried to raise my foot and shift the weight. My efforts were quite useless, my struggles only served to give my ankle a great wrench.

I suppose it was not more than half a minute before, the centre of a sympathising crowd, I stood disencumbered from the package. Desirous, above all things, to avoid notice, I

Some of the houses in Russell Road, in which thoroughfare was the house where such strange occurrences happened to Sara.

disclaimed all offers of assistance, and essayed to walk away. The first step brought a cry to my lips, my ankle was throbbing violently, to walk was an impossibility.

Then it was that the owner of the packages, and the wearer of the velvet gown, rose to the occasion. Incircling me with a stout, protecting arm, she poured forth tearful regrets at what had happened—regrets that increased in volume when she discovered I had but just arrived in Birmingham.

"You must come back with me, my dear," she said. "Go to the hospital?"—as I urged the desirability of such a course. "I wouldn't hear of such a thing. Here, John!" to the burden bearer—"put these things down and help me take this poor thing down the stairs. The carriage is outside, my dear, a nice comfortable carriage, that will take us home in less than half-an-hour."

For a moment I hesitated to accept her offer. I had grown suspicious of my kind, and seemed to see the hand of Templeton and Co. in everything. I felt it would be wiser after all to go to the hospital, and yet the recollection that at a public institution, one is compelled to resign all right of judgment, all liberty of action, made me pause. The notes, the papers—into whose hands might they not fall? I glanced at the grieved face of the kindly woman who supported me. Whatever else was lacking in her countenance, candour and innocence abided there. It was preposterous to suppose the accident an outcome of the firm's villainy.

Clever as they were, they could not ordain that I should be injured by a type-writing machine—for such the package proved to be—at such and such an hour at New Street Station. The woman was evidently a person of means, if not of consequence; she would shelter, and possibly help me in my fight against my enemies and Noel's.

"I will come," I answered faintly, "and thank you very much."

With the assistance of Mrs. Moran, as I learnt my companion was called—and the faithful, if surly John, I reached the bottom of the steps in safety. True to her description, there waited just outside a smart-looking victoria, well built, well turned-out, drawn by a spanking pair of chestnuts.

The footman descended from his perch, moved the rugs, and assisted me to take my seat, with a countenance which displayed neither curiosity nor surprise. Mrs. Moran settled herself beside me, and John having disposed the parcels in safe corners of the vehicle, we set off.

Up Hill Street, with its atmosphere of grime and squalor, its hideous steam trams, the incessant clanging of whose bell send thrills of apprehension through one. Never have I seen such horrible conveyances as these same trams. Drawn by a locomotive engine, they belch forth huge clouds of black and noisome smoke, clattering about the lines with a jerky rattle that jars every nerve in the body of the unfortunate passenger.

My nerves were highly strung, and hence they appeared to me to be the acme of discomfort.

It seemed strange to emerge from Hill Street, dirty and narrow, into a splendid square. A magnificent site set round with tall, majestic piles, that keep a faithful watch and ward over the white statue of Queen Victoria that names the square. Dark and stately, the municipal buildings frown upon the street; the art gallery uprears its graceful tower against the sky. In the distance one catches a glimpse of the green trees and fountains against the University. A fair city, a brave city—one's heart goes out towards it, until passing the Town Hall, you find yourself once more in dirt and squalor, made doubly hideous by the dangers of the terrible steam trams. Just outside the Town Hall a shabby looking figure raised his hat, and gazed wistfully at Mrs. Moran. She flushed, looked uncomfortable, then suddenly returned his nod.

"That's Arthur Merridew," she said, "a late clerk of my husband's. He's very poor; I'm sorry for him."

Later I learnt to be sorry for him also.

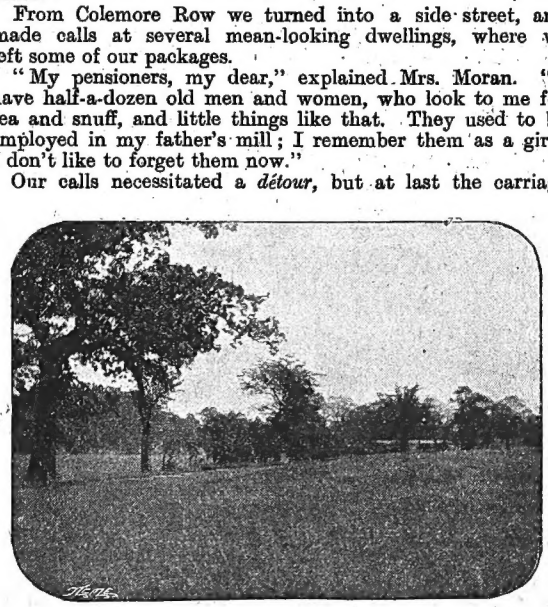
From Victoria Square we went up Colemore Row, where Mrs. Moran pointed out her husband's offices. He was an engineer, it seemed, and held in high esteem by his fellow citizens.

I was destined to become closely acquainted with that office.

From Colemore Row we turned into a side street, and made calls at several mean-looking dwellings, where we left some of our packages.

"My pensioners, my dear," explained Mrs. Moran. "I have half-a-dozen old men and women, who look to me for tea and snuff, and little things like that. They used to be employed in my father's mill; I remember them as a girl; I don't like to forget them now."

Our calls necessitated a *détour*, but at last the carriage



The mysterious house overlooked the "Reddings." The photograph shows a tract of this land.

swung into the Bristol Road, a fine wide thoroughfare planted with trees, that shaded well-built dwelling-houses.

Leaving the slums behind, we bowled along towards the pleasant suburb of Edgbaston. In this part of Birmingham, the steam tram has given place to the electric-car, models of comfort, speed, and elegance.

From the Bristol Road we turned off to the left, until we came to Russell Road—one of the pleasantest thoroughfares

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imaginable. Mrs. Moran—who had been solicitous as to my comfort throughout the drive—pointed out an imposing looking residence as our destination.

"Here we are, my dear," she said, and beamed a cheery welcome.

The stolid footman assisted me to mount the steps, and guided me across the hall into a pleasant sitting-room. Mrs. Moran settled me comfortably on a couch, and bustled off to send for the doctor.

The latter appeared in due course, and announced that with a few days rest my ankle would be all right.

"She'd better not be moved, doctor?" questioned my hostess. "There, now, my dear, you hear what he says, you're to stay with me for a week at least."

She seemed genuinely delighted at the prospect, and after a few minutes thought, I agreed to remain. I told her my name and my profession.

"I'm a typine, Mrs. Moran, and I was told there were more openings for employment in Birmingham than London. Things weren't so overcrowded. I have no parents, no people—only"—my voice faltered—"only my sweetheart, Noel."

She suggested I might like to send a telegram to my lover. I was deliberating on the advisability of such a course, when our conversation was disturbed by the arrival of Mr. Moran.

Tall and dignified, with a cold manner, and eyes that read you through and through, I feared him from the first. A man of about thirty-five, younger by ten years than his wife, he impressed me with a sense of his capacity, of great abilities and illimitable ambitions, Truscot Moran would have sacrificed his dearest friend for his own advancement.

He listened to his wife's account of our acquaintance, and put a few sharp interrogatories himself.

"You're a typine, you say. Do you write shorthand?"

"Yes," I answered. "Are you in want of a clerk?"

"That's as may be," he replied, "while you're here, however, it will do no harm to see of what you are capable. Your foot will be well again soon, you tell me. Well, then, you might do some work for me on Thursday."

With a cool nod, he sauntered from the room, calling his wife to accompany him.

I lay back on the couch and wondered at the strange turn my fortunes had taken. At last, it seemed, I had found a safe resting place. Surely my troubles were over, I could stay here until my lover came for me, and that would be only a matter of a day or two.

I reached the telegraph forms my hostess had just left me, and proceeded to write a long, explanatory message to Noel. As I wrote the last word I remembered I had not the full address of the house I was in. I knew it was in Russell Road, but of its name and number I was ignorant.

Just as I was deliberating whether I could manage to cross the room and ring the bell, Mr. Moran returned.

"My wife tells me you want a telegram dispatched, Miss Gillespie. I am sending to the post-office—or, rather, I am going there myself. I shall be happy to send a wire for you at the same time."

"Thanks very much," I answered. "First of all I should like to ask your exact address. What number or——?"

"No number, Miss Gillespie. Russell Road, that is all that's necessary. Is your wire ready?"

He moved to the foot of the couch, waiting expectantly.

I was just about to hand him the message when I caught sight of Mrs. Moran standing just behind her husband.

The woman's face had whitened, her rosy cheeks were flaccid, her eyes frightened and full of apprehension. Her big frame shook as if with strong emotions, her hands clasped in each other in awkward supplication.

She made a sign towards her husband, then pointing to the telegram, violently shook her head.

"No, no!" she motioned with her lips. "No!" and clasped her hands. Then, shaking and cowed, she edged off through the doorway. Moran and I were left alone.

"Are you ready, Miss Gillespie?" His face relaxed into a smile; at times Truscot could be fascinating.

"It's very good of you to trouble, Mr. Moran, but on second thoughts I don't think I shall wire after all. Telegrams are such inconclusive and unsatisfactory things. They always frighten people, and when, as is now the case, there has been a slight accident, the news stated baldly and briefly comes as a terrible shock. I shall write a letter instead. Thank you all the same," and with a pensive look I tore the message into fragments and lay back upon my pillow.

"Please yourself, of course; still it seems rather strange not to acquaint your friends with your whereabouts."

"A letter will tell them everything more fully," I replied And with that he had to remain content.

Later in the afternoon I was helped upstairs to a bedroom. The house was large and of considerable architectural pretensions. The rooms, lofty and imposing, were handsomely furnished and in good taste. The walls were hung with pictures, all of them striking, some of them famous. My room, at the back of the house, had a pleasant view. From the bay window one looked over a green expanse of grass, trees, and hedges. This space of ground, traversed by foot paths, is called the "Reddings," and is as pleasant a spot as you could find in the environs of a great city. My room was daintily furnished, and with a due regard to comfort. I could have been peaceful and at rest, but for the strange warning I had received.

Why had Mrs. Moran signed to me not to give my telegram to her husband? Why?

My thoughts were interrupted by Mrs. Moran herself.

"Have you everything you want, my dear?" she asked. She paused upon the threshold, anxious, it seemed to me, to avoid a lengthy conversation.

"I want one thing," I answered, "and that very badly. I want to know why you distrust your husband, and why you feared to let me give him my wire?"

She came closer to me, with noiseless, awkward movements. Her large face, white and staring, gazed down at me.

"I—I'm strange sometimes," she answered, "and do queer things. You mustn't take any notice of me whem I'm like that. It's my head, I think; it aches and throbs, until I feel I shall go mad."

She lifted her hand to her forehead, then meeting my eyes flushed a dull red.

"Then there was really no reason why Mr. Moran should not have taken my telegram? Perhaps it is not too late to give it to him now?"

"Don't give it to him. Don't——" Her voice trailed off into a sob. "I can't say anything more, my dear, you must not ask me anything more. Just get well as soon as you can, so you can go away. It's better you should go away. I thought I should be able to have you to myself. I took a fancy to you, and planned for you to stay here altogether. But it's no use. It is not to be. Besides," her voice fell into a whisper, "you must go," she said, "or it will be with you *as with the others.*"

Eagerly I demanded an explanation of her words, but she broke from me, hastening out of the room. Left to myself, I thought the situation over. There were certainly grounds for alarm, but—and of this I was convinced—what I had to fear was something different and apart from the persecution of Templeton and Company. All the same the prospect of staying in this house, if only for a few days, was sufficiently alarming. Who were the "others," and what ill-fate had overtaken them?

It seemed to me more than ever necessary that I should communicate with Noel that day. There were pen, ink, and paper on the table, and before long I had written to my sweetheart, inclosing the letter in one addressed to Maggie Dunkley, at Northampton. Then I rang the bell, and asked the maid to request Mrs. Moran to come up to me.

The poor lady had somewhat recovered her spirits. She had changed her velvet gown for one of amber satin, and under the soothing influence of its magnificence was less pessimistic.

"I won't question you, dear Mrs. Moran," I began. "I don't want to know anything it would distress you to tell me. All I ask is that you post this letter yourself. There is a

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pillar box a little distance down the road, I noticed it from the carriage. It would not take you long to slip out and run across. Will you do it for me? *Please*," I added, and, with a sudden inspiration, I clasped my arms about her neck and kissed her ample cheeks. The caress startled her. She strained me close and kissed me ardently.

"If I'd had a daughter," she cried. "If only I'd had a daughter!" and the emotional creature positively sobbed.

I endured her endearments for some few minutes. Then once more pressed my point. To my dismay she still proved obdurate.

"I dare not," she said, "and then it wouldn't do you any good. You must get well, and——"

Impatiently I interrupted her.

"If you won't help me, I must go myself." As I spoke I started from the couch and essayed to walk briskly across the room.

Alas! My fortitude could not endure such pain. I was forced to sit down, groaning with agony.

Mrs. Moran, genuinely distressed at my suffering, did her best to comfort me.

"Listen," she said. "I can't go out myself; my husband would be angry if I left the house so late, but I will send the parlourmaid, and watch her from the door."

"Do you mean the woman who waits on me?" I asked, with an instinctive dislike for her secretive eyes and furtive manner.

"Oh, no, not Rachael. She——" Mrs. Moran paused and bit her lip. "Janet shall take it; she's a nice bright girl. I can trust her."

I resigned the letter, and waited in anxiety till I received an intimation from Janet as to its safe postage; then, having managed to hobble to the door and lock it, made my way back to the armchair by the fire.

The evening passed quickly; the hours of ten, eleven, twelve resounded from the deep-toned bell of the hall clock. The house was hushed, long ago the servants had retired to rest, Mrs. Moran's wavering step had passed my door, her husband's heavy tread shortly following. The silence grew oppressive. I shivered, and glanced fearfully about the room. A stranger in a house of mystery; what evil might not come upon me before the morning?

I reproached myself for having yielded to Mrs. Moran's intreaty that I should go to her home. Yet what could I have done? Here at least my papers were left in my possession—my hand stole to my heart for re-assurance. In a hospital or infirmary that would have been taken from me.

And yet this place was very strange; through the darkness of the night, it might be even now, some evil thing was creeping near me.

I glanced towards the door. Did it move, did I see the handle turn?

With an effort of will I steadied my nerves sufficiently to take a long quiet look. I had been mistaken, imagination had played me tricks. The door was still fastened, securely locked.

If I could make up my mind to go to bed I might get rid of these strange fancies—this dark sense of foreboding that oppressed me. What could Moran do after all? I was in England, in one of the most enlightened cities of the Empire What harm could overtake me? It was not as if I had fallen into the hands of Templeton and Company. Then I might have cause for fear. And yet for all my reasoning, all my will, I could not shake off the terror that sat brooding over heart and brain.

My eyes, seeking to find something on which to rest, roved round the room. It was a large room, and at one time had opened into a smaller one. Now, however, the communicating door had been closed up, and papered over, only the fanlight gave sign that it had once been there. The long narrow pane of glass had an odd appearance without the door beneath. It fascinated me, again and yet again my eyes returned to the same spot.

Of a sudden the lamps that lit the room went out with the peculiar celerity characteristic of electric light. It was uncanny in the darkness, the fire had grown black and cold, not a spark of light came from its ashes.

As I sat, my heart beating heavily, a faint light streamed through the room. I raised my eyes, and with a thrill realised that it came from the fanlight. A moment, and then horror convulsed me. I tried to scream, but only a hoarse murmur came from my lips. There, staring at me through the glass, was, what seemed to me, *the face of a dead woman!*"

(The Birmingham episode concludes next week.)

His Little Joke.

AND THE HAPPY RESULT IT BROUGHT.

"THERE! I will wear Mr. Hoffman's red roses—they are so beautiful—with my dress, and are so becoming to my complexion. Charley will be furious, of course, but I can't be troubled about his jealous whims. Put that lovely cluster a little higher in the puffs of my hair, Lizette, and loop my overskirt with the other. There, Miss Meyer, don't you like that?"

Miss Meyer was the young woman who had brought the dress home from Madame Dumesnil's. She was considered to have wonderful taste, and she always stayed to see the dress tried on, and make any alterations that might be needed, and suggest the ornaments to be worn with it.

She stood off at a little distance, with her head on one side, and gazed critically at the beautiful Miss Creighton: a beautiful little creature herself, in spite of a mournful droop at the corner of her mouth, and some faint little lines of care. Her very ideal of Marguerite in *Faust*, Miss Creighton declared her to be, with her childish face, pure, sea-shell complexion, and the blonde hair, which she always wore hanging in a long, heavy braid.

"I think it is perfect!" she said, after she had walked slowly round Miss Creighton. "There is nothing wanting. Those beautiful roses have added the touch of bright colour that was needed."

"It was just like Mr. Hoffman to send them. He has such exquisite taste!" said Belle Creighton, gazing delightedly at her reflection in the mirror; a tall, graceful figure, with folds of creamy silk and frost-like lace falling about it, a perfect face, dark eyes, both soft and bright, like a Spanish woman's, and warm black hair, in which the deep red roses "blushed and burned."

"I don't think he has any better taste than Charley!" said Nan Creighton.

Nan was a schoolgirl, and was looking on with admiration at her sister's toilet, and wondering if her time would ever come.

Belle's lip curled slightly, and she tossed a bouquet into Nan's lap.

"You may have his bouquet, since you admire his taste so

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much—nothing but common flowers! I shouldn't think he took the slightest pains, or considered my complexion at all."

"But Mr. Hoffman——"

"Pardon me—I take a great liberty—but what did you say the gentleman's name was?"

The little dressmaker's sea-shell pink cheeks had taken a deeper tint, and there was a startled look in her eyes.

"Hoffman. Carl Hoffman, the distinguished musician. You have heard of him, of course?"

"I hear but little of music now, and it is a great grief to me," the girl said, shaking her head sadly. "But the name startled me. It is long since I have heard it. I once had a friend of that name, but he is dead."

"I am so sorry for you!" cried good-natured Nan.

"Here, you shall have this bouquet. I don't care for flowers, unless I can wear them."

"Thank you. I love flowers, and I seldom have any," said little Miss Meyer, wiping away a tear, and taking her leave with a grave courtesy.

"Miss Meyer, be sure you come with my green dinner dress. Tell Madame Dumesnil I always want you to see my dresses after they are done, if they are only wrappers. Your taste is charming."

"I will tell her," said Miss Meyer gravely.

"What a queer, grave little soul that is," said Belle. "So different from the rest of Madame Dumesnil's flaunting, stylish shop-girls. I wish I could have her for a maid; she has twice as much taste as you, Lizette, with all your French airs."

The ugly, high-nosed Frenchwoman, dropped a curtsey, and said with a laugh, but with a spiteful accent:

"Mademoiselle is very good!"

"No, I am not very good," said Belle candidly. "If I were, I should take more interest in that girl, and try to find out what troubles her, and try to help her."

"And if you were good you wouldn't treat Charley Forester so badly," said Nan, who was very fond of her future brother-in-law.

"What do I do to Charley?" said Miss Belle indifferently, while Lizette wrapped her in her opera-cloak.

"You flirt outrageously!—that's what you do, and when he doesn't like it—as I should like to know who would—you say he is jealous, and threaten to break off your engagement. If I had such a noble, true lover as Charley Forester, I would be true to him."

"Oh, the wisdom and virtue of fifteen!" said Belle.

Mrs. Creighton came in at that moment, stately in velvet and point-lace and diamonds.

"Now, Belle, I don't want to see any flirting to-night! Everybody is beginning to talk about you and Mr. Hoffman, and Charley is downstairs, looking perfectly wretched. I know he dreads going anywhere with you. If you don't stop these performances you will be sorry!"

"Another variation on the same air!" said Belle, with a yawn. "Gay youth and hoary age both lift up their voices against me. No, mamma, you're not old; you look like a beauty to-night. But don't talk to me any more about flirting. If it isn't stupid enough to be engaged to one's third cousin, whom one has known all one's life, and played with when he wore knickerbockers, without being absolutely forbidden to look at another man! And am I to blame because they will follow me about? I should think it was bad enough to have Charley such a jealous idiot, without your taking his part. No; I am not going to break my engagement if Charley will behave himself; but if he is going to stick close to my side everywhere I go, looking as if he contemplated immediate suicide, glowering at every man who speaks to me, I can't endure it, and I won't!"

And Miss Belle sailed downstairs, with her head very erect.

"Oh, Nan, I hope you will never be the trouble to me that that child is!" said her mother, with a sigh. "I hope you'll never be so handsome!"

"I hope I shall be!" said Nan anxiously; "but I won't flirt—at least after I'm engaged, though I will flirt awfully before." (This last clause *sotto voce*). "Anyway, if Charley had as much spirit as a man ought to have, he wouldn't have it!"

Charley, a fair, handsome young man, but with a rather woe-begone expression, was pacing up and down the drawing-room when his betrothed came sailing in, in all her splendour.

His face brightened suddenly at sight of her.

"Belle, who was the girl that I met coming downstairs as I entered?" he demanded, neglecting altogether his customary affectionate greeting.

"Now he is going to rave about his flowers!" thought Belle. "One of Madame Dumesnil's shop-girls, who brought my dress home," she responded indifferently.

"A shop-girl! She looks more like a princess! The loveliest face I ever saw! And so much grace and elegance about her, too!"

Belle stared at him in unaffected amazement.

Never, since he became her devoted slave, at the age of eight years, had she heard him express the slightest admiration for or interest in any young woman.

And not a word did he say about his flowers, though he must have seen them in Miss Meyer's hand.

"She is rather pretty," said Miss Belle coldly.

"Rather pretty! Why, where are your eyes, Belle? She is a perfect beauty!"

"How do you like my dress?" asked Belle, changing the subject.

"Very much. Did she make it? I should know she had exquisite taste by her own get-up."

"Get-up! What do you mean? She had on a black cashmere dress, made as plainly as it could possibly be."

"Well, perhaps she had, but there was an air and style about her dress. By the way, Belle, what is the matter with you? It seems to me you are not looking quite so well as usual. Feeling a little fagged, are you?"

This was too much for Miss Belle, who was sure she had on the most becoming toilet she had ever worn in her life, and was looking more brilliantly beautiful than she had ever looked before. She turned her back upon him and fortunately her mother appeared, and led the way to the carriage at that moment.

What had "come over the spirit of his dream" was more than Belle could guess.

Could it have been that little Miss Meyer, Madame Dumesnil's shop-girl? Belle had heard of love at first sight, and surely she was beautiful enough to turn any man's head.

But, then, Charley was in love with her—dreadfully so, he had seemed to be. About seven times as much so as she wanted him to be, she had been wont to say. Could such things be?

Revolving this problem in her mind, Belle was unusually silent and *distraite* all the way to Mrs. Maynard's, where the evening party was to be given. Charley, too, seemed lost in thought. As they got out of the carriage, Mrs. Creighton whispered in his ear:

"She shall behave better to-night, or I'll take her home!"

"Don't! Let her go to the end of her chain. I'm on a new tack!" he whispered in return.

Once in the thronged, brilliantly-lighted rooms, with the air heavy with perfume, and the band sending forth bewitching strains, Belle's spirits revived. If Charley wanted to fall in love with little dressmaking Miss Meyer, he might; she would show him that she didn't care.

Mr. Hoffman was there. He was a distinguished musician, who had recently come to the front, and he was "all the rage." He wasn't considered "eligible," of course, being only a musician; but he was so handsome and so elegant in his manner, that all the young ladies were bewitched with him. His hair was just touched with white, and he had a melancholy air, which made him all the more interesting. He was quite devoted to Miss Belle Creighton, and it could not be denied that she encouraged his attentions.

"It is perfectly shameful—the way Belle Creighton goes on with Mr. Hoffman!" remarked one young lady (who would have greatly preferred to monopolise Mr. Hoffman's attention herself). "And it's about the fortieth flirtation

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she has had since she has been engaged to Mr. Forester! And he goes mooning about, looking as doleful as an owl, and not speaking to anybody!"

But Charley was not as "doleful" to-night as usual. To be sure, he was not particularly devoted to the young ladies; but he did make himself agreeable to the dowagers, and he did not "stick to Belle's side," nor "look as if he contemplated immediate suicide."

Once, when they were dancing together, he said carelessly to Belle:

"How beautiful your roses are!"

And Belle replied enthusiastically:

"Aren't they exquisite? Mr. Hoffman sent them to me."

And, instead of looking angry or despairing, he answered indifferently:

"He has very good taste, then—a fine fellow every way, I think, and a real genius musically!"

Praise of Mr. Hoffman now! Belle looked at him in silent amazement, and he seemed suddenly to think that he was going too far.

"But I don't think it looks very well for you to dance every other dance with him, Belle!" he said.

Belle saw that that speech was the result of an afterthought and drew her own conclusions. He did not care now how much she flirted with Mr. Hoffman, but he did not wish to change his manner so suddenly that she should guess his secret. And he only said that it didn't look very well; the looks used to be the last thing to trouble him!

Belle did not feel at all happy; her flirtation with Mr. Hoffman had begun to seem a flat, stale, and unprofitable thing. But yet she was not going to wear the willow for any man. Charley should not see that she even noticed his indifference.

The next day came little Miss Meyer, with the dinner-dress. Belle looked at her with a new interest. She certainly was beautiful enough to make a man forget his first love, she decided. The dress was very pretty, and Belle's vanity caused her spirits to rise to the highest pitch.

"I wonder if Charley would say I didn't look as well as usual if he could see me now," she thought. "Miss Meyer couldn't look like this!"

"Run down and let Charley see you," suggested Nan, who was always present at her sister's toilets when it was possible.

"How came Charley here at this time of day?" she asked.

"He is here, talking to mamma in the library," said Nan.

Belle threw her train over her arm and ran downstairs.

Charley and his future mother-in-law seemed to be having an earnest *tête-à-tête*, which was suspended as soon as Belle appeared.

"'It was a beauteous lady, richly drest?'" sang Charley. "That is uncommonly gorgeous, isn't it, Belle? But I am not quite sure that green is your colour! Did that same little girl bring it home?"—eagerly.

"Miss Meyer brought it home," said Belle stiffly.

"It is a beautiful overskirt," said Mrs. Creighton, who was inspecting the dress critically.

Miss Meyer slipped and fell. Charley hastened to pick her up.

"Of course I don't pretend to be a judge," said Charley, "but it seems to me that if it were looped a little higher on the left side it would look a great deal better."

"I don't know but what it would," said Belle, with her mind wholly upon her dress.

"I'll let Miss Meyer try it."

"Let her come down here and do it! I want to see the effect," said Charley, coolly.

Belle drew herself up haughtily, and was about to sail out of the room; but a new idea struck her. Should she let this cool young man think she cared how much he admired a pretty shop girl—think that she was jealous of him? Perish the thought!

"Ring the bell, Charley, and I'll send for Miss Meyer."

Miss Meyer came, grave and quiet, as usual, and made the proposed change in the overskirt.

Charley expressed his approval enthusiastically, and Belle, being on the watch, caught him bestowing a very admiring glance upon the beautiful dressmaker. It was very doubtful whether little Miss Meyer had the benefit of it, however, for she scarcely looked up.

When she had gone Charley drew a long breath.

"That is the most exquisite creature I ever saw!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose she could be induced to sit to an artist? Will Van Amsden would give his eyes for a chance to paint her!"

"I don't know. I never thought of trying to lead her out of her proper sphere in any way. She has very good taste, and suits me as a dressmaker, and that is all I know about her," said Belle icily.

"I think you and Will Van Amsden had better not meddle with a pretty dressmaker," said his future mother-in-law. "You would only turn her head with your flatteries!"

"But such beauty as that ought not to blush unseen—now, you know it ought not! Why, I don't believe there's a woman in the kingdom who could hold a candle to her! And she has such a lovely expression—such a sweet, appealing look in her eyes——".

Belle went out and banged the door at that moment.

Could it be possible that a faint, smothered laugh sounded in her ears as she ran upstairs? She thought not, for surely her mother would not stoop to laughter with that graceless fellow! She was vexed with herself for showing that she was angry, and resolved that it should be the last time she would give him that satisfaction.

She went upstairs and sent Nan out of her room, was cross to Lizette, and snubbed little Miss Meyer and dismissed her. She resolved to punish her lover by not making her appearance again that night, not suspecting that he meant to go away before dinner. But shortly after the door closed upon little Miss Meyer she heard it close again, and, looking out of the window, beheld Charley following closely in Miss Meyer's footsteps.

The dressmaker crossed the street, and Charley crossed also.

The pavement was icy, and little Miss Meyer slipped and fell.

Charley hastened to pick her up.

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"Just the chance he wanted! And the artful little minx probably did it on purpose!" thought Miss Belle in her anger. But on purpose or not, Miss Meyer had evidently sprained her ankle. She tried in vain to stand.

"A very interesting situation," thought the unsympathetic Belle.

She saw Charley point to the house, as if suggesting that she should be carried there. But Miss Meyer shook her head decidedly. Then Charley hailed a passing hansom, put her into it, and, oh! climax of horrors! got into it himself also.

"Ah! he is the true gentleman!" said Lizette, who was also looking out of the window. "As polite to the poor little modiste as if she were a lady! And truly she could not get out of the carriage alone, if her ankle is sprained or broken, as it seems."

"I'll break my engagement!" resolved Belle. "I've threatened it often enough when I didn't mean it; but now I will do it. This is a great deal more than his being jealous!"

In the meantime Charley was divided between sympathy for poor little Miss Meyer's sufferings and gratitude for the accident which had given an opportunity of making her acquaintance.

He accompanied her home, and made himself as agreeable as possible to the motherly old woman with whom she lodged. Little Miss Meyer's shy gratitude to him was very pretty to see, but he stayed only long enough to obtain permission to call again when she was better, and hurried in search of a doctor to send to her.

Then he hastily dispatched a messenger with a note to Mrs. Creighton, directing it carelessly, so that it looked as much like Miss as Mrs., and, oh, artful Charley! directing the messenger to say it was for Miss Creighton.

Charley's handwriting was well-known, and the note found its way at once into Belle's hands. She opened it and read:

"DEAR MRS. CREIGHTON—*Fate has favoured me, and I have made the acquaintance of the lovely little dressmaker, and I think I am right. I felt so strongly attracted to her the first moment that I saw her. I know you will be my friend in this, but how shall we break it to Belle, who, I am afraid, cares more than he deserves for a man who can, at most, give her only a divided heart. Think as kindly as you can of one who once hoped to be your son.* "CHARLES FORESTER."

Poor Belle sank down on the floor, not quite fainting, but feeling that her life, or all that made life worth living, had suddenly come to an end. Charley loved her no longer! Her mother was to help him break the news to her! This was so much more dreadful than her wildest fancy! And how cool he was about it!

But then her conscience whispered to her that in the three years that their engagement had lasted, she had sometimes been decidedly "cool" in declaring to him that she would flirt with whomsoever she liked; that she never would marry him, and that she did not "care a bit" for him. Poor Belle! She knew, now, whether that last statement was true or not. Oh, how much dearer to her was one hair of his head than Mr. Hoffman or the dozens of other men whose attentions and flatteries she had received and encouraged.

But she had fairly worn his love out, and the natural result had come. She had only herself to blame. But nobody should know she cared; her pride should sustain her even when they "broke the news" to her!

She re-sealed the letter carefully, and sent it to her mother, but no comment upon it passed between them.

A week passed and she did not see Charley. Another week, and he only wrote her a cold and careless note, saying that he was "very busy."

Then one day at the breakfast-table her mother began with the air of one who has a weighty matter on her mind:

"Belle, I have something to tell you."

Belle, who had grown visibly paler and thinner in these last two weeks, nerved herself for the coming blow.

"Charley has discovered that Miss Meyer is much above her station."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Belle, unable, with all her pain, to resist a touch of sarcasm.

"She has a sweet voice which has been very carefully cultivated. I went to see her yesterday, and heard her sing. She is anxious to find pupils, and I am confident that she can. She promised to sing. She has a very sad story, poor child. I am going to arrange a little musical evening on Thursday next. She came over from Germany to meet her lover and found that he was dead. She was detained after she had secured passage on a vessel by a long illness, and the vessel on which she was to have sailed was lost, with all the passengers, so that her lover, before he died, supposed her to be dead. She was homeless and friendless here, and had no resource but her needle."

"She has found friends now," said Belle coldly.

"Why, Belle, I am ashamed of you, not to show more interest in this poor girl! It is not at all like you!"

"With such devoted friends she doesn't need my poor assistance," said Belle, as she rushed out of the room, to hide a burst of tears.

Pride led her to don her bravest attire and her brightest smiles on the evening of her mother's little *musicale;* led her also to greet Charley with an assumption of gay indifference, which, unfortunately, did not accord well with her altered looks.

It was a small and select assemblage which Mrs. Creighton had gathered together for the purpose of displaying her *protégé's* talent.

Mr. Hoffman was there, handsome and melancholy as ever. Little Miss Meyer came in and took her place at once at the piano.

Mr. Hoffman volunteered to play her accompaniment. As he drew near she turned as white as a lily, and stretched her hands out towards him, crying:

"Franz! Oh, my Franz!" and fell fainting in his arms.

"Lena! My little Lena! Has the sea given up its dead?" he cried.

Miss Meyer did not sing that night. Charley drew Belle away into a quiet corner as soon as possible.

"I knew just how it was going to turn out, and I wanted to tell you before, but your mother thought it was better not. You don't look downhearted, Belle, but I was afraid—really a little afraid—that you cared for Hoffman!"

Belle drew herself up haughtily, but a little smile stole around the corners of her mouth.

"I should think you were the one to look downhearted!" said she.

"About Miss Meyer? That is my little joke! Were you really a wee bit jealous, Belle? Then I haven't plotted in vain! You see the way of it was this. Hoffman and I were better friends than you knew. He told me his story one day. I think partly because he knew I was jealous of him, and he wanted to assure me that I needn't be. When he first came to this country, and for a long time afterwards, he was very poor. At last he scraped together enough money to send for his sweetheart, but the vessel on which he supposed she sailed was lost, with all the passengers.

"Then he came here, and having good luck, he dropped his own Christian name, Franz, not wishing to be known as the poverty-stricken fiddler who had only played for balls and parties. He showed me his sweetheart's picture, and told me his heart was buried with her, and he should never care for any other woman. The moment I saw Miss Meyer on the stairs that day I knew she was the original of that picture! I saw that you did not like my being interested in her. Ah, Belle, I believe I should have lost heart entirely if it had not been for that sign that my darling did care for me, and I determined to try you a little in that way, while I was finding out whether she was Hoffman's sweetheart. Your mother planned the denouement. She thought we might be mistaken, and it was better not to raise false hopes in them. It seems that Hoffman had disappeared so suddenly from his few friends that they thought him dead, and told Miss Meyer so. Now, Belle, I want to know if it is true that without the existence of love there can be no jealousy?"

"Oh, Charley, I have been so wretched!" murmured Belle with her head on his shoulder. "I'll never flirt again!"

Henry Laroche.

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

III.—THE DILEMMA OF BETTY CARTERET.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

A WOMAN, still fair, as the dying rays of the sun fell on her luxuriant brown hair, and touched with almost youthful bloom the thin cheeks of her earnest face, stood before her easel, painting with all her mind and soul as well as with all her strength.

It was a well-proportioned face, and a good face, with the look of calm contented waiting that comes to those who have learnt the lesson that happiness is not the lot of the many, but of the few—let those be thankful who can find peace.

But with a smile that softened her features, with a tenderness that was beauty in itself, she turned towards the radiant vision that burst impetuously into the studio, though she only said:

"Betty, child, when will you learn to come in gently."

Betty Carteret was indeed (as the old folks say) "a sight for sore eyes," "sweet and twenty," she radiated joy and life from the top of her curly head to the tip of her slender, arched foot.

"Oh, bother!" she cried, running across the room and throwing her arms round her sister's neck. "Now, Katie, you bad old thing, what *do* you mean by refusing Sir Edward Fairbairns? I have just met him looking as glum as an owl, and I know what that means."

"Oh," said Kate, disengaging herself and turning to her easel again, "I was very sorry. I had hoped I had made it plain to him long ago, and that he would spare me the pain of a direct refusal."

"Why could you not marry him? He is very nice! Now don't turn away like that; look me in the face and tell me."

Thus adjured, Kate turned round, but could not help a girlish-looking blush from stealing over her face as she replied:

"You know I am not free, my heart was given eight years ago."

"I knew it was that old tale," she cried contemptuously, "but, Katie, you really *are* absurd! Your engagement to Geoffrey Hilton came to an end five years ago, and, of course, you are free, and so is he."

A spasm of pain disturbed the serenity of the elder sister's countenance, and, putting down her brushes, she passed her arm round Betty's waist, and sat down by her in the broad window-seat.

"Betty, darling, you were only a child of fifteen when he went away, and you could not understand my reasons for acting as I did. Geoffrey was an engineer, but there was little hope of his getting on in the old firm, and we had been engaged for three years. Then came the chance for him to go out to the mines in South Africa, and I could see he was wild to go, but did not like to leave me to more weary years of waiting. I loved him too well not to wish for his happiness, so I bade him go, and go free. I would not have him hampered by me in any way. He was not to go out merely with the idea of getting a home together for me as soon as possible, he was to be absolutely free to choose the path most likely to lead to ultimate success."

Betty gave her sister a warm hug, and said:

"You are a dear, unselfish darling."

But Kate shook her head and continued:

"He knew I made enough to live on; he could not know mother would die a month later. He thought I was happy and comfortable with my painting to fill my mind, and mother and you to——" She hesitated and then went on: "To fill my heart." Then, with a sudden compunction for her hesitation, she added impulsively: "You have been the joy and comfort of my life."

"And I?" cried Betty, enthusiastically, "what should I have done without you? You have been mother and father and sister and all to me."

Kate could not repress a sigh as she added:

"What shall I do when you get married?"

"Oh," said Betty airily, "I shall not marry at all. We shall be the two old maids of Thorn Cottage."

"*You* do not look cut out for an old maid," said Kate, gazing fondly at the lovely face beside her.

"On the contrary, I 'feel a vocation' for it," said Betty gaily. "The truth is that Geoffrey will come back and marry you, and what will become of poor little me then?"

Kate blushed once more, but replied slowly:

"It may be he is married already."

But a few days later came the letter for which Kate Carteret had waited so many years. It was a short note from Geoffrey saying he was sailing immediately for England and hoped to find a welcome waiting for him from his "old friends at Thorn Cottage, Crowbury."

"Why, Katie, how handsome you are," cried Betty, looking with wonder at her sister's transfigured face.

"Nonsense!" said Kate, "remember I am past thirty, and faded and worn."

But Betty put a dimpled hand over each of her shell-like ears and stopped her sister's mouth with a kiss.

"I won't hear such rubbish. You *are* beautiful, and he will love you more than ever when he sees you," and then she ran away, laughing over her shoulder at her blushing sister.

It was true that hope had brought a renewed youth to the

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elder. Her eyes were brighter, her step lighter, and a faint pink shone in her cheeks, and the eye of love would be able to find all the beauty of twenty-two in thirty, with character and spirituality added thereto, but if the eye of friendship only looked upon her, it would see only a good woman, whose youthful beauty was faded with watching, waiting, and anxiety.

At last the anxious weeks of waiting were over, and Geoffrey Hilton arrived. The years that had turned Kate from a charming girl to a grave woman, and Betty from a lively child to a lovely girl, had made but little difference to the man of twenty-nine who presented himself before the sisters one glorious autumn evening at the cottage. His shoulders were broader, his face more bronzed, and his manner more assured.

The fate of three was settled in the first few minutes as Geoffrey held Katie's hand, and each eagerly scanned the face of the other.

Thought Kate with exultation:

"He is just the same, my noble love!"

Thought Betty with a strange, tense feeling at her heart:

"He is very handsome, and I think his love must be worth enduring much to gain."

Thought Geoffrey, as his eyes wandered from Kate to Betty:

"Poor Kate looks much older, but good Heavens, how lovely Betty has grown!"

The succeeding month only served to intensify these first impressions. Geoffrey spent nearly all his time at Thorn Cottage, and the inevitable crisis approached nearer every day.

Kate with quiet, serene happiness in her heart, went about her usual duties, managing the house, caring for Betty, visiting the sick, and painting with an added power from the joy that pervaded her being. Content to see Geoffrey every day and to wait till he should ask her for what had been his for so many years.

Betty was possessed with a feverish restlessness that lent a brilliancy to her eyes, and a brightness to her complexion that Geoffrey thought made her almost too beautiful for earth. She hardly knew what had happened to her. Sometimes she was unreasonably happy, and at others more miserable than she had ever been in all her happy life, and over these moods she seemed to have no control; they were something outside herself.

At last it came.

One evening the little maid ushered Geoffrey into the drawing-room where Betty sat alone gazing at the fire that leapt and crackled in the grate. Her eyes were full of tears, she knew not why, for she was not sad.

She jumped up at his approach, but forebore to ask for lights lest he should see the tears that were yet in her eyes.

"Sit down and wait for Katie," she said hurriedly, "she has just gone to see poor Mrs. Smith who has a tiny baby, and is ill with pneumonia, so Katie goes every evening to bath the baby and settle the mother for the night when the nurse comes and takes her place."

Geoffrey hardly seemed to hear what she said, he only knew they were alone, and he had never seen anything so lovely as her graceful figure with the fire-light glancing on her rounded cheeks and lighting up her curls.

His silence and the intentness of his gaze made her nervous, and for the sake of saying something, she said:

"I like this light, don't you? It is so full of mystery."

For answer he leant forward, taking her two hands in his, and saying in almost a whisper:

"Little Betty, oh, little Betty, the mystery is here, in us. Since the first moment I saw you in the setting September sunshine, I have known there is no happiness for me apart from you. Darling, tell me, do you love me?" And he strove to draw her to him.

A flood of joy that was almost pain, swept over Betty, and for a moment she yielded to his gently compelling arms, then it receded and horror overwhelmed her in a black tide.

She pushed him back with all her might, her face so white which a minute before had been rosy.

"But it is wrong—wicked——" she stammered. "How can you? Think of Katie."

"Katie!" he cried, "but that was all over years ago. We certainly were engaged, but she in her wisdom broke it off, and now—oh, Betty, listen to me. I love you, I love you. You are the only woman in the world for me. From all time it was ordained that we should love."

But Betty could only refuse steadfastly to listen, though it was music to her ears.

"I—I—thought you came here because you were going to ask her again."

"Betty, child, what are you running your dear little head against? It is certainly true, if you must know, that it was in my mind when I set out for England to see if she were still unmarried and willing to have me, but," he added with passion, "when I think of my feeling towards her and compare it with the love I have for you, I know that you are my real mate, my second self."

"But," murmured Betty faintly, "what if *she* thought—as—as—I did?"

"Nonsense!" he said firmly. "Katie is much too sensible a woman. She gave me up five years ago, and now any one can see she is wedded to her art. She has no place for me, or any other man, in her happy, well-ordered life. If I thought otherwise"—and his brow darkened—"if for a moment I thought she had continued to consider herself bound to me all these five years, and waited for me to return and claim her, if I thought that," he repeated, turning almost fiercely to her, "I would never have said a word to you of my love—I would have married her, and before God I would have made her happy. But now," he said, turning tenderly to Betty, who, cold and rigid, was gazing straight before her seeing nothing, "we know it is not so. Love me, my darling, and let us take the happiness that God has given us. She would be the first to wish us joy."

"The first to wish us joy?" Yes, Betty felt in her heart perhaps she would, but it would be from a broken heart.

"Give me time; I cannot answer you now," she cried brokenly, and left the room hurriedly.

Katie, coming in ten minutes afterwards, wondered to find the room empty and dark, and the fire nearly out.

For hours Betty sat huddled up in the window-seat in her bedroom, feeling not the cold of her body for the misery of her soul. Why was this sacrifice, not only of *her* happiness, but also of his, demanded of her? Why was the fate of three persons given to her, who had hardly ceased to be a child, to decide? Over and over again her numbed brain formed the words:

"He loves me, and I love him, but he would marry her if I told him the truth. Shall I tell him, or shall I say nothing?"

L. Hughes.

THE MISTAKES WE MAKE.

Compiled by C. E. CLARK.

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A Tale About Bedford.

WHEN Colonel John Bolders retired to Bedford on half-pay, he naturally took with him his three most cherished possessions.

These were a son called Tom, a prize bull-dog called Chutney, and a temper called snappy.

The house he occupied in De Parys Avenue was semi-detached, his neighbour being a widow some fifteen years younger than himself. On the afternoon of the Colonel's arrival he went out accompanied by his little son and Chutney to inspect the garden at the back of the house. After a brisk march round, the old soldier's curiosity was satisfied, and he finished his cigar on a bench in the middle of the lawn.

The boy, however, continued to play about until he presently found himself opposite a break in the hedge, through which he could look into the next garden.

Scarcely five yards away from him he saw a little girl of about the same age as himself, sitting upon a basket chair. To his intense surprise she suddenly began to call out in a very persuasive voice: "Tom! Tom! Come here, I want you!"

The boy stood hesitating for a moment. She could scarcely have seen him, for her chair faced in the opposite direction, and, besides, he had only that moment appeared at the gap in the hedge. But he had heard his name called distinctly, so he passed into the other garden and walked towards the girl. She turned as he approached.

"You called for me?"

She shook her pretty little head silently, too shy to speak.

"Oh, but you did! I heard you distinctly!" cried the boy.

"I only called for Tom."

"Well, I'm him."

"That doesn't sound right," she answered gravely. "You shouldn't say 'I'm him,' you should say 'that's me.'"

"Well, they're both right," he protested. "I'm him and that's me."

"But you can't be him and me as well."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's this way. Now listen very closely, please, and don't wriggle. I called him and him's Tom, and me's I and I'm Eileen, and you're not either of us," she added triumphantly.

"Yes, I am, I'm Tom," he protested.

"Is that your name?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see now. But I was calling our cat. See, there he is going down the path."

The boy turned round again and saw a magnificent Persian cat trending his way daintily down the garden. A presentiment of evil occurred to him.

"Don't let him go through into our garden," he cried. "Chutney would kill him straight off."

"I don't know Chutney."

"He's dad's bull-dog."

"Well, he mustn't." And the child's lips began to quiver, "and you're not a nice boy at all. Here's mother coming, I'll tell her I mustn't play with you."

Tom stood irresolute as the girl ran to meet her mother. And whilst matters were at this stage there was a sudden hoarse growl from Chutney, followed by a snarl from the Persian, and then the latter raced along the garden-path into the house, followed by the ungainly form of the bull-dog.

The lady who had just come out caught her daughter up in her arms, and followed the two animals into the house.

Meanwhile the Colonel had been aroused by the noise of the combat, and now found his way through the gap in the hedge into his neighbour's garden.

"Tom, what are you doing here? What's the matter? Who's hurting Chutney?"

The question was answered automatically, for the bull-dog presently appeared in the kitchen porch, whence he ambled sideways towards his master. He was followed at a respectful distance by a servant girl who carried a broom-stick, and looked "as though she would an she dared."

"The hugliest hanimal I hever set heyes upon," she cried, "folks as keeps bull-dogs needs keepin' theirselves." And she nodded to her own mysterious thoughts. "Straight weskits for man and beast and no queschuns harsked," she muttered, and then with a sudden glance at the indignant Colonel, "Was you pleased to hown this luvly dog, sir?"

"Pleased and proud," snapped the old soldier. "Have you a message to deliver to me? If so, deliver it, and go away."

What she would have said to this terrific insult cannot even be imagined, for at this moment Mrs. Howard herself reappeared and bade Jane return to the house. The Colonel was already hatless, so he bowed profoundly and then took the war right into the enemy's country according to his habit.

"I regret exceedingly, madam," he began, "that your people should have been allowed to plague and ill-treat my poor dog as they have done. A poor, timid, mild, inoffensive animal that wouldn't hurt anybody——"

"After it had eaten them," retorted the lady with some warmth. "Your dog should be kept under better control, sir. It is dangerous, especially where there are children."

"You are mistaken there, indeed. It wouldn't hurt a child for anything."

"You must allow me to believe my own eyes, sir. Eileen,

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come indoors at once, and please remember you are not to play with that little boy any more."

The lady turned and walked majestically into her own house, with her little daughter dragging at her hand and stealing a wistful look towards her new playmate. The Colonel stalked back to his own territory, where he ordered seven days C. B. for Chutney, and threatened Tom with a similar punishment if he spoke to the little girl next door. And so the great feud began.

* * *

It might have been expected that a quarrel arising out of a misunderstanding would soon have righted itself, especially as the parties concerned were next-door neighbours. But when you get an old soldier with a villainously quick temper opposed to the widow of an old soldier who had a still more "Indian temper," and when both parties are too honest to claim they are in the right and too proud to admit they are in the wrong, a trifling disagreement may drag on for a long time.

One evening the Colonel took a turn in the garden just after sunset. As he sauntered quietly down the path, he took out a cigar and proceeded to cut it. At the same moment he heard the sound of voices whispering. He stopped suddenly and silently, his first thought being that burglars were hiding, waiting till the early morning before they commenced operations.

The old soldier felt that he was in for a treat. It was not heroic work certainly, but it would serve, and anyhow the odds were against him. Before deciding on his plan of campaign he resolved to draw a little closer and try to learn something of the enemy, and with this idea he crept quietly down the path until only the hedge separated him from the burglars. For by this time he had discovered that they were in the next garden.

"Not that it makes any difference," he thought sturdily, "If I found a man robbing my bitterest enemy I'd capture him as a public duty."

Indeed, if the truth must be admitted, he was rather pleased than otherwise at his discovery, for the service he hoped to render to his neighbour might prove a means of reconciliation to that lady, without any loss of dignity on either side. Such a reconciliation was ardently desired by the Colonel who liked courage wherever he met it, and was delighted with the undaunted manner in which Mrs. Howard had repelled his onslaught. So he came closer, and this is what he heard:

"It's only a few years more," whispered Burglar No. 1, "and then we shall be old enough to marry and it doesn't matter what they think, because we shall be so happy together."

"I hope so," whispered Burglar No. 2, "but you can please yourself anyway because you're a man, Tom, and men always have their own way. I've heard nurse say so, and she said it killed pa, becos he'd have lived longer if they'd conterdicted him offener."

The Colonel crept away with a grim smile lurking about his grizzled moustache. And just as he got to a safe distance he heard the voice of Jane calling in the sweet accents of Cockaigne:

"Miss Heileen! Miss Heileen! Come here at once! Where have you been, you naughty child?"

"I've been talking to Tom ever so long," said the child happily, "and he's ever such a nice boy, and we're going to make mother and Tom's father be friends, and then we're going to be married. And they won't be lonely becos we' going to live in Tom's house and his father will come and take care of mother, and we'll go and see them quite often, you know."

The Colonel had not intended to punish his son for disobeying instructions, seeing that the information had been obtained by eaves-dropping. But the boy, hurrying back to the house, suddenly ran against his father in the dark, and explanations were inevitable.

"Where have you been?" said the latter, in a gruff voice, that was absolutely belied, if Tom could only have seen, by the pride that shone in the Colonel's eyes.

"I've been talking to Eileen, dad."

"Humph! Direct breach of instructions. Three days C. B.," growled the Colonel.

The little fellow saluted in military fashion as his father had taught him, but made no complaint. They returned to the house together in silence. When they reached the door, the Colonel stooped and kissed his son.

"I'm going out to smoke," he explained. "Good-night, my boy."

"Good night, dad."

Colonel Bolders, left alone in the garden, lighted his neglected cigar carefully and slowly. Then he blew out the match and dropped it very deliberately to the ground.

"If that lad doesn't rebel," he thought grimly, "I'll drive him out of the family. But I'm not afraid that he'll disgrace me. He won't tell a lie to save his life, but, all the same, he won't have his love affairs interfered with by a chuckle-headed old fool who's ashamed of himself and daren't say so."

"So they're going to be married and leave the grown-ups to take care of themselves. No, not quite that, to take care of each other. Humph!"

* * * * *

On the following evening, when the Colonel returned from his customary stroll, he inquired whether Tom had gone to bed. The servant to whom he spoke appeared rather surprised, but said that the boy had gone out about an hour previously, and had left a note for his father in the drawing-room.

The Colonel hurried along the hall and soon obtained the important document. It was written in a very straggling fashion with sundry blots and smudges, but the boy told his tale with commendable brevity.

"DERE DAD,"—he wrote—"*I'm runing away with Ileen becos we are both miserble and we are going to be married, and Please excus haste.—Your loving son,* "TOM."

When the Colonel had read this letter twice over he put it into an envelope addressed to Mrs. Howard, and desired that it might be delivered to her at once.

Then he set off to find the truants which was by no means an easy task, for there were several streets, along any of which they might have gone. The first, and perhaps the most likely way led him through the centre of the town, for he thought the two children would simply have wandered out of De Parys Avenue into High Street, without giving a thought to their pursuers.

But just as he crossed the Square, two persons passed him on the other side. They were Mrs. Howard and Jane, and they passed the Colonel at a quick pace, apparently without having noticed him. And as they went down the High Street, he changed his mind suddenly and turned to the left.

He soon reached the Embankment, and here a fresh terror gripped his heart. He glanced swiftly along the course of the river. There were two people standing a little distance away, gazing earnestly into the moonlit water. The Colonel gazed also, but could see nothing. He was beginning to

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run along the Embankment, eager to know what the other party had found, when they moved slowly away.

He sank upon a seat with a hoarse cry of relief. The doubts and terrors that had assailed him vanished in an instant, and he rose to his feet again to recommence the search. There was no time to be lost, for even as he moved there came on a heavy shower of rain.

With this new source of anxiety, he turned hesitatingly from right to left. Then he decided to cross the river and search the meadows at the other side. But this time he felt hopeless from the first, for the runaways were not likely to have come to such an open place.

The rain was still pouring down as he turned the corner of the band-stand, but what cared he? There before him lay the two children! Tom sat propped up against the side of the stand with the girl's head resting upon his knee. She had evidently fallen asleep in that position, and he had taken off his little Eton jacket and laid it over her shoulders to shelter her from the driving rain.

The Colonel cleared his throat gruffly as he approached.

"Tom," he growled, and then with a sudden change of manner, "stand up, my boy, and put on your coat. I'll carry Eileen."

The boy rose and trotted home by his father's side in silence. Even when they reached the High Street and were joined by Mrs. Howard and Jane, he seemed to take but little interest in the meeting. And as for Eileen she slept soundly until the following morning, when she wakened in her own cot.

Mrs. Howard and the Colonel were silent also, but there was no hostility between them now. Neither liked to make the first advance, however, although they both tried to coax their stubborn tongues to speak. And so the great opportunity passed away and they parted at the garden-gate with the merest formula of politeness.

Tom's unusual silence was explained the next morning. He awakened with a severe cold, which threatened to turn into pneumonia. The doctor shook his head very seriously, gave careful instructions to the housekeeper, and went his way, after promising to call again later in the morning.

Meanwhile the boy called unceasingly for his little playmate, until the Colonel at last resolved to sacrifice his pride, and to ask if she might come in. But just as he had made up his mind the doctor reappeared.

"Going to beg for the little girl?" he said. "Humph!" Would it relieve you in any way, Colonel, if I called on Mrs. Howard and asked her. I know her very well, and——"

"No, sir, said the other sturdily," "I appreciate your motive. I suppose you have heard of our little squabble."

"That is so, Colonel, and I thought——"

"No, thank you. I'm very grateful, doctor, but this is a case where it wouldn't be right to beg a favour by deputy. I'll go at once and get it over."

The two men left the room together. The Colonel saw his visitor off, and then made his way to the front door of his neighbour's house. He rang the bell with some misgiving, for the errand he came upon was not much to his liking.

"Is Mrs. Howard in?"

"No, sir, she went out only half a minute ago; said she'd be some time."

The Colonel groaned audibly.

"Which way did she go? Can you tell me?"

"I can't, sir, she left the house by the side door."

"Thank you, I'll call again." The poor father turned away with the boy's cries ringing piteously in his ears. He unlocked the door of his own house and entered slowly and almost unwillingly, wondering what he should say.

As he opened the bedroom door, he found to his surprise, that his son was fast asleep, and his breathing was almost normal. Someone rose from a chair by the window, someone whom the Colonel in his trouble had not noticed until then.

"I have taken a great liberty," she whispered, "but your boy caught his illness entirely through the care he took of my little girl, and, as I know something of nursing, I felt bound to offer my services at any rate."

The Colonel grasped her outstretched hand, and then, with a sudden gesture that sealed their reconciliation, he raised it to his lips.

"I have been to your house," he whispered, "to beg your forgiveness for my rudeness, and to ask if your child could pay a little visit to Tom. They're so fond of each other, they've quite mapped out their lives together."

He came to a stop, as a particular portion of the plan proposed by Eileen occurred to his memory. And Mrs. Howard, looking at him, blushed suddenly and turned towards the sleeping boy.

Wal Frank.

Your Editor Chats.

THE third Unsolved Love Problem appears on page 651, and I still keep open my offer of ONE GUINEA for the best solution of the difficulty.

I know my readers like to have an opportunity to show their powers of lucid reasoning, and they have in "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret" an excellent field for argument.

An answer is wanted to the question which concludes the story, "Shall I tell him, or shall I say nothing?" and the guinea goes to him or her who sends in what I consider to be the most all-round satisfactory reply. Write clearly, on one side of the paper only, and do not exceed one hundred words.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Love Problem" marked in the top, left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, the 27th of November. None arriving after this day will be considered, but you may send them in as early as you please.

Those who have decided to send in replies in connection with the problem, "The Mistake of Millicent Howard" must remember that the closing day for that competition is Friday, November 20th.

I AM glad to be able to say that "A Criminal Millionaire" is very popular with my readers. When an author with the reputation that Mr. George Griffith enjoys contributes a serial great things are always expected, and I feel assured now that nobody will be disappointed, for the appreciatory letters that have come to these offices concerning "A Criminal Millionaire" have been as congratulatory as they are numerous.

Wilfrid Ellerton's adventures in the Underworld, the machinations of Isolo Staunton, and the development of the suspicions of Stanislaus Smith, *alias* de Ronski, will make very interesting reading for the forthcoming instalments.

ON page 665 there appears for the first time "Our Bachelor's Observations." These are contributed by a bachelor on our staff, who spends the best part of his day evolving epigrams and cynical sayings. But, as "there's many a true word spoken in jest," the feature will prove most instructive.

THIS is a little foreword to let you know that the Christmas number of *Short Stories* is in preparation.

I may truly state that this will be a colossal production, surpassing anything that has ever yet been brought out, and that, as you all know, is saying a good deal. It will be published on December 15th, and will consist of sixty-four pages, brimful of absorbing literature.

As an indication of what may be anticipated, you will be glad to hear that W. Pett Ridge, the well-known humorous author, is contributing an excellent story, one of his very best. This is just one of the tit-bits.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of Society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

Isolo had picked up an axe to end the existence of the other man, when the boy, divining his purpose, intervened, and received the weapon on his own head.

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be!

Staunton's blood is Spanish, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton has told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death, in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Wilfrid Ellerton, during the night, is, by a piece of ingenious trickery, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated that he had fallen overboard and been drowned.

When Mercedes hears the news—the glibly spoken lie—she falls fainting to the deck and becomes seriously ill.

In consequence of the alleged accident the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé* have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton, leaving full arrangements for the disposal of Ellerton, goes personally to break the sad news to the latter's father.

Two nurses are taken on board to tend Mercedes, and one of these is Janet Yuill, who turns out to be the wife of Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and now First Officer on the *Isola*.

The yacht sails away, presumably to the Mediterranean, but it really makes for the regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Suddenly the yacht comes to anchor, and marvellous are the things that now happen.

Ellerton, unconscious, is put into a small diving-chamber, and accompanied by Ramiero and Captain Durtal.

Then the chamber sinks many fathoms below the sea, and they alight in a most gorgeous underworld, where Ellerton is to be kept a prisoner.

M. Herarra, reigning for Staunton in this kingdom under the Seas, receives full instructions as to the manner in which the lad is to be treated.

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THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Underworld.

WHILE Herarra's visitors were talking in his almost magically luxurious reception-room, his second in command, Andrée Ducos, a man who had once been a captain of Engineers on the general staff of the French Army, but who had betrayed his trust, had re-opened the door leading from the Central Chamber to the gallery.

He posted an armed sentry on each side of it, gave a few orders to a couple of subordinates, and presently a procession of about a dozen of the slave-workers—for these descendants of the old sea-warriors who had been so strangely entombed in the Underworld, were now nothing better than this—came out from one of the five tunnels which led into the chamber towards the door.

Each was carrying on his shoulders a small square box, which was evidently very heavy for its size. Ducos went before them into the gallery, and stood beside the entrance to the lift. Each box bore a letter and a number, and as it passed him he checked them off on a tally-sheet. When the lift was full he closed the water-tight door and told the captain of the *Isola* that his first consignment of cargo was ready.

As soon as the answer came back over the wire the covering plate slid back, and the lift returned to its place in the hull of the yacht. The operation was repeated six times before the conversation in the reception-room was finished, and by that time considerable material had been provided for the further mystification of the civilised world on a subject in which it had been for some years both deeply and angrily interested.

When the lift descended for the seventh time Ducos closed the doors and informed his chief by telephone that the transfer of the cargo was complete and that the lift was ready.

"Well, gentlemen," said Herarra, as he put back the receiver, "my lieutenant informs me that the work is done, and the lift awaits your pleasure"

"Then, my dear Herarra," said Don Ramiero, rising from the soft, silken-covered cushions on which he had been reclining, "I think we had better thank you for your generous hospitality in just one more glass of this very excellent wine of yours, and then get back to the other world. I don't think there is anything more of importance to say."

"No, Señor, I think not," replied Herarra as he opened another bottle of champagne and the golden-haired attendants presented the foaming glasses on their silver salvers. "I fully understand the instructions with which I have been honoured, and you may be confident that they will be carried out to the letter. As I said before, when my esteemed guest wakes he will begin a new life in a new world, which I shall do everything in my power to make a pleasant place of residence for him. Saving only release, and the sight of earth, and sea and sky, all that man can desire shall be his."

"Not by any means a bad exchange," laughed the captain of the *Isola*, with a comprehensive glance about the splendid apartment. "There's many a poor follow wasting his life up yonder trying to keep a maimed soul in a starved body, who would be glad enough to say 'good-bye' to sun and stars on those terms, and your guest will be more than foolish if he gives way to any vain regrets for what he can never see again. Well, Señor, since we must go, here's *au revoir*, and success to you and your wonderful kingdom under the sea."

"And to that I will add many pleasant days and years for its new citizen," said Don Ramiero, also raising his glass. "By the way, Herarra," he went on, with a glance at the three girls, "you will have to find our young friend a wife. Certainly there should be no difficulty in pleasing him in that respect, and, of course, nothing could reconcile him more quickly to his change of worlds than the loving companionship of, for instance, one of these ladies of your submarine paradise."

"I have promised, Señor," replied the Spaniard, setting down his empty glass and taking a cigar from one of the girls, "that nothing shall be wanting to complete the happiness of his new life with us. Surely you do not think that I could forget the most important consideration of all. Certainly if I did it would not be long before my good wife reminded me of it. Women, you know, are the same all over the world—and under it too."

Don Ramiero took a last look at Ellerton, who was still breathing quietly, and lying motionless on the divan, and turned away thinking, not, perhaps, without a twinge of regret, how tremendous a difference he had been the means of making in the fate of this man, and in that of the girl who was even now, perhaps, dying a mental death for love of him.

When the lift had carried his visitors back to the yacht, and his domains were once more absolutely shut off, as every dweller in them save himself believed, from the world above, Herarra closed the gallery door and told his lieutenant to send the four bearers who had carried Ellerton from the lift to him. One of the sentries was sent to fetch them, and when they came they stood in a row before him with hands behind them, and heads downbent, like so many chidden schoolboys.

"Sigur, Elfreth, Jan, and Gurt," he said in sharp, stern tones, "you have done work to-day which you are now ordered to forget. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, lord, we understand," they replied together, speaking mechanically like a chorus, and bowing their heads still lower.

"Good," said Herarra, "and when you forget that, remember also that you have never seen the stranger, and that you do not know how he came here. If he learns anything it will be the boiling lake for all of you. You know the law?"

"Yes, lord, we know it," they murmured again, "we will obey."

"You had better," was the harsh reply, "and now, to reward your obedience, you are released from more work to-day, and you shall be made happy. Ducos," he went on, turning to his lieutenant, "send them away to their quarters and fill them with rum till they can't lie still without holding to the floor. They'll have forgotten all about it by the time they come to their senses again."

"Very well, sir," answered Ducos with an evil grin, "there's nothing like a good drunk now and then to keep these animals in their proper places. Jacques here will take care that they don't know the difference between up and down inside an hour."

"We thank you, lord," came the mechanical chorus again, and then the grinning sentry marched the serfs off to, in the most literal sense, drain the cup of their degradation to the last drop.

As soon as he had settled this little business, Herarra returned to the reception room to do something which was a good deal more important, for now the time had come to rouse Ellerton from his drug-slumber, and to introduce him to the strange world which, according to the decree of its absolute ruler, was to be his dwelling-place for the rest of his life.

The three girls were still in the room when he returned, for he had told them to watch the sleeper.

"Brenda," he said to the tallest and, perhaps, the most beautiful, "this is the stranger who has come from very far away, from a place like the shining world which your old traditions tell of, but he does not know where it is or how he came here, for he has been mad since then, and, moreover, he has sinned very deeply against the lord of this cave-world where we dwell, and whose word is law to all of us, and so he is banished for the rest of his days. Do you understand all that I am saying?"

"Yes, lord," the girl replied in a very sweet voice, and in English which had a strange, old-world sound. "I have remembered all your words, I shall not forget them."

"That is very good," he continued kindly, laying his hand gently on her silken-gold hair. "And do you also understand, Thyrza and Myra?"

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The other two bowed their heads, and said in their low, sweet voices, "Yes, lord, we have heard and understand."

"Now, I have told you this," he went on, "because you have seen him brought here, and because you are to wait on him, and bring him food and drink, and play on your harps and zithers, and sing to him when he desires it, for it is the will of him who commands, that this stranger shall be treated kindly and punished only with banishment. But he is to learn nothing of how he came here, or who came with him, or why he is here. If he learns that, then, beautiful as you are, and obedient as you have always been, you will not escape the death of those who disobey."

They instinctively shrank away from him and went nearer to each other as he spoke the last few words, for the death was a very terrible one—nothing less than being flung from a ledge of rock into a lake of boiling, sulphurous water twenty feet below it. Then Brenda crossed her hands over her breast and said:

"Lord, we will obey," and the others followed her example.

"Very good again," he said going towards the divan. "Now, Thyrza, go to the kitchen and bring a pitcher of hot water, and you, Myra, bring the tray with the spirits and a glass. Brenda, do you go and stand at the end of the divan there, so that when our guest's eyes open they may look upon the fairest face and form in Cave-Land."

The girl's eyelids rose for a moment, uncovering a pair of great, lustrous eyes, blue as the sky they had never looked upon nor ever would while Isolo Staunton remained lord of this hidden realm. An almost imperceptibly faint tinge of pink came into her cheeks as she looked at Ellerton's sleeping face, and then her eyelids fell again, and she did as he had bidden her without a word.

When Thyrza came back with a long-necked silver jug, of apparently old Norse workmanship, in her hand, Herarra mixed a glass of old liqueur brandy and water, and when he had taken a sip at it to try the strength, he slipped his arm under Ellerton's shoulders and raised him to a half-sitting position, telling Thyrza to pile up the cushions behind him. Then he took a spoon, and, while Myra held the glass, opened his mouth slightly with his left hand and poured a few drops into his lips.

After the third application of the hot spirit his jaw moved, and there was a convulsive motion of the throat. Then Herarra dropped the spoon and held the glass to his lips. A few drops went down and then a few more, mechanically swallowed, then came a little gasping cough, and his eyes opened.

For a full minute they wandered hither and thither over the gorgeous draperies of the walls and ceiling, the gleaming mirrors, and the splendid ornaments and furnishings of the great chamber. Then they seemed to get the focus of things. At length they rested on Brenda's lovely face, framed in its shimmering halo of golden mist.

"Mercedes! Darling, have you come back to me, or am I dreaming still? I have been ill, or sleeping, or both, a long time, eh? But I have dreamt of you—but, no—you—yes, you are beautiful, but you are not Mercedes. Who are you? And you, too. You are not Señor Valdez or Doctor Billaud. Where am I—what have you been doing with me? I am not dreaming still, am I?"

The words came feebly and jerkily at first, but they quickly gathered strength and coherence until the last were almost angrily spoken. As he looked at Herarra he sat up suddenly, and while he was staring into his eyes he put out his hand mechanically and took the glass from him. He drank nearly half the brandy and water in quick gulps, and with each gulp his strength seemed to return in waves of warmth. Then he fixed his eyes on Herarra's again and said suddenly in Spanish:

"You—you—where have I seen you before? No, no, I can't remember now. My head's too weak still. But I have seen you somewhere, and I shall remember soon. Who are you? Don't you recognise me? What place is this I've been brought to? I was on the yacht with Mercedes and the rest of them only—no, how long ago is it?"

Herarra did his best to repress a violent start and did not quite succeed, for he, too, had been wondering where he had seen his guest before. He remembered now, and in his recollection he found a very good personal reason for obeying his instructions to the letter.

"My dear and honoured Señor," he replied in his softest Andalusian, "permit me to offer my most thankful congratulations on your very long-delayed recovery. Do me the favour of taking a little more of the spirit. You are still a little weak. Ah, yes, that is well. Now will you lie back and take some rest?"

"I may as well do that," replied Ellerton, sinking back on the cushions which Thyrza had piled up behind him. "But you have not answered my questions. Who are you? What place is this, and how did I get here from the yacht? Come now, I must know that at once."

Herarra looked steadily at him for a few moments. Then, seeing no further sign of recognition, he shook his head, and said:

"My dear Señor, I am deeply sorry that I cannot answer all your questions because I do not understand them; but I will answer some since you seem to have forgotten. I am Leon Herarra, a dweller in Cave-Land like yourself, This is one of the apartments of your dwelling. Of any yacht—whatever that may be—or of her you have called Mercedes, I know nothing. Nor do I know how you came here, if not, like myself and the rest of us, by the usual process of being born here. You have been ill for many weeks, and it may be that in your fever you have dreamt of many strange and impossible things that your eyes have never seen. But you are well again now, and you will soon forget these and return to your old life."

"My old life, man! What the dickens do you mean?" exclaimed Ellerton, sitting up again and staring angrily about him. "I know nothing of this place. I never was here before, and though I seem to have seen you before, it certainly was not here. And yet you have the assurance to tell me that I was born here! It's a lie, and you must know it, whoever you are. I was on board Mr. Staunton's yacht—only a short time ago, and I can prove it——"

He stopped short. Could he? A numbing sense of some horrible mystery descended swiftly upon him. The stimulus of the brandy was dying away fast. The shock was too great for his drug-enfeebled brain. The lights and the mirrors grew dim. He uttered a gasping little sigh, and fell back on the cushions, almost into Thyrza's arms. When he woke Herarra had gone. A soft hand was gently bathing his forehead with a sweet-smelling essence, and a lovely girl was waving a fan of snowy feathers over his face.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Financial Mystery.

On the evening of the day on which the *Isola* dropped her anchor in the pretty little harbour of Monaco, and Doctor Billaud had kept both his promise and his prophecy by delivering his patient to her father perfectly cured in body and mind, save for that one little cloud which had descended upon her intellect and utterly blotted out all recollection of the happenings of that fatal morning on which he had formally announced the death of Wilfrid Ellerton, a somewhat important meeting of four

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persons took place in the private office of one of the Assistant Commissioners of Police at New Scotland Yard.

The Commissioner's guests for the time being were the Deputy Master of the Mint, a Treasury Solicitor, and a fair-haired, blue-eyed, pink-and-white complexioned, harmlessly insignificant-looking little man whose official position was Chief of the English Department of the International Secret Police.

His name was Stanislaus Smith. Of course he had a dozen or so official *aliases* only too well-known to cosmopolitan criminality, but that was his real one.

No man in Europe or America had run more distinguished criminals to earth, or exposed and wrecked more artistically-designed schemes for the swindling of the simple than Stanislaus Smith, but at last he had been compelled to confess that, for the time being and, until some quite unexpected revelation happened, he was quite as much at sea as the Assistant Commissioner himself, and that was saying a good deal.

There had been silence in the room for some few minutes, during which the Commissioner and the Deputy Master had been running through several wide-margined pages of figures and statements, the latter in French, German, and Italian, while Mr. Stanislaus Smith conversed in scarcely audible tones with the solicitor from the Treasury.

At length Ellerton's eyes rested on Brenda's lovely face, and he mistook her for Mercedes.

Then the Deputy Master, looking very grave and troubled, left the desk and took a vacant arm-chair, crossed his knees, and placed the points of his fingers and thumbs together in an attitude of anticipation.

"Well, gentlemen," the Commissioner began, leaning his elbows on the sloping front of the desk, "I am afraid that we must confess that, up to the present, no solution, by which I, of course, mean no logical, practical solution of this extraordinary problem seems to be any nearer to us than it was to the West Indian authorities some twelve years ago, when, as you know, a similar puzzle on a smaller scale confronted them. And yet, as far as I can see, there is no possibility of doubting the facts, is there, Sir Edward?"

"Not the slightest," exclaimed the Deputy Master, uncrossing his legs and sitting bolt upright. "There are the facts, and we cannot get away from them any more than we can explain them. That is the most exasperating part of the whole business.

"If there is an industry in the world that ought to be capable of exact checking as to its output it is the minting and distribution of money. Every civilised country in the world keeps the most exact returns. Fraud on the part of mint officials or workmen is simply impossible. Any attempt at trickery would be discovered within a week.

"No, I say again, and I think that Mr. Dennisen and Mr. Smith will agree with me, that, so far as the mints of the civilised world are concerned, it is hopeless to look to them for any clue to the mystery—for that, after all, it is. What do you say, Mr. Smith?"

"I quite agree with you, Sir Edward," replied the detective in a voice that was almost as soft as a woman's. "It's a little humiliating, I must confess, for people of experience in matters of this kind to have to admit that they are beaten, even for a time, but after working on the case with my European colleagues for over a year now, I'm afraid we've got to say that we are just about where we started."

"And yet surely," said the Treasury Solicitor, taking his monocle out of his left eye and looking critically at it, "if the age of miracles has really passed, there must be some human explanation of the thing. It can't be possible to swindle the whole civilised world in this way without someone giving the fraud away. Whoever the principals are, they must employ hundreds of agents all over the world, and surely if the Governments put their hands in their pockets and offered a really big reward, say a hundred or even two hundred thousand, with a guarantee of indemnity, someone would be tempted to give the show away."

"I'm afraid that you are hoping rather too much, Mr. Dennison," replied the Commissioner, taking up a few foolscap sheets from his desk. "We have now practically complete returns from every country in the world which mints its own coinage, and these returns show, as far, of course, as can be ascertained, the excess of coinage in circulation over the output of the mints.

"We ourselves have, roughly speaking, about two and a half millions' worth of silver coin, and half a million's worth of gold, which Sir Edward confesses himself quite unable to account for. Germany is nearly four millions to the bad in silver and nickel coins, and more than a million in inferior gold. France and Russia have lost over ten millions between them on gold and silver coin, and as much again on notes,

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which not even the official printers can tell from their own work. Our advices from the United States show that the Washington Mint and the Assay Office are some fifty million dollars wrong in their calculations as to coin, while the surplus of notes amounts to nearly twice that sum.

"Italy and Spain, too, have been flooded with silver coin with which gold has been bought, and then, as in the other cases, the gold has vanished. The same thing, only on a greater scale, of course, has happened in Austria, and even in Japan. The Banks of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and our Colonies, as well as those of Europe, are beginning to gravely doubt their own paper.

"And yet, as is the case with multitudes of coins which cannot have issued from any authorised mint, the counterfeits are so perfect that they cannot be told from the real things. Even the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street can no longer boast that her promise to pay cannot be successfully imitated; and when it comes to that, gentlemen, I think you will agree with me that matters are becoming rather serious."

"They are so serious," assented the Deputy-Master, "that if some means cannot be found of discovering and putting an end to these amazing frauds, the financial balance of the world's markets will be upset, and I need hardly say that that would mean something very like the control of the world—for it must be confessed that modern civilisation rests upon a cash basis—by those who command the sources of these mysterious supplies. They exist somewhere and they simply must be discovered if Society is not to be swamped by this unceasing flood of illicit money."

"Of course, everyone must agree with you there, Sir Edward, as far as the theory goes," said the Treasury Solicitor, screwing his glass into his left eye, "but the difficulty is in the practice. To my mind the most extraordinary part of the puzzle is the fact that, as Mr. Smith will tell you, the police of Europe know every professional coiner and counterfeiter in and out of prison, and they are also absolutely convinced that if all these gentry were allowed to join forces and work without let or hindrance for a couple of years on end they would not be able to account for a hundredth part of this mysterious output of coins and notes."

"Yes, that is perfectly true, Mr. Dennison," said the detective, suddenly waking out of what appeared to be a very brown study, "and I can tell you something else which, in its way, is even more curious than that. These coins and notes which come from no one knows where, are so perfect and they are produced in such quantities that, as an old expert at the game was telling me only last night, the regular professional cannot make his craft pay, so he is going out of business and taking refuge in burglary.

"The one fact that we may make sure of, gentlemen," he went on more seriously, "is this. The people who are working this world-wide swindle must not only have great capital—which, of course, they have now—but they must also have a perfect organisation and, what is more important than all else, they must have some place or places, which the rest of the world knows nothing about, in which they can carry on the practical, mechanical part of their work—work which, I think, Sir Edward will agree with me in saying, must at least be equal to that of the English Mint and the Bank of England put together."

"Undoubtedly," said the Deputy-Master, "if anything I should call that a low estimate. And yet it seems utterly incredible that such a vast industrial organisation, as we know it must have been for the last four years at least, can exist in any part of the known world without being discovered. To my mind it seems utterly absurd, and yet, unfortunately, it is only too true."

"That, after all, is the crux of the question," added the Solicitor. "Half the detectives of Europe and America have been trying for years to catch the people who pass these notes and coins, and they have not caught one. They have only caught the agents of the pettifogging practitioners who make half-crowns out of pewter pots and Britannia metal spoons, or idiots who think they can reproduce notes by photography. The trouble with these people, whoever they are, is that they turn out as good stuff as the mints and the banks do. No, we shall never catch them on bad quality. I daresay we ourselves have changed hundreds of their coins—and a good many of their notes, too, perhaps. Is not that possible, Sir Edward?"

"I am afraid it is only too possible," was the smiling reply. "You see, these people are really practical bimetallists. As mere silver at the present price, four five-shilling pieces, allowing for the expense of minting, would be worth about nine shillings; but, as fourth parts of a sovereign, they are worth twenty, and, of course, the same is true in degree of shillings, francs, marks, dollars—in fact, of any silver coinage on a gold basis. Given the plant and a safe place to work it in with plenty of raw material, and the profits would be at least a hundred per cent., and on the notes it would be about a thousand, or more. I fully agree with Mr. Dennison that the only way to put a stop to this ruinous work is to discover the place or places in which it is carried on."

"Quite so, Sir Edward," said the Commissioner, drily, "and since it is plain that such place or places must exist somewhere, and as they must of necessity be pretty large, we have got to find them, even if they are located at the poles. I am sorry that, after all this time, we have not been able to get any further than theory. We must hope that Mr. Smith's little trip to Monte Carlo may lead him to something like a clue."

"I most sincerely trust so, sir," said the detective, in a by no means sanguine tone, "but until I know what my colleague Trapané may have to tell me, I am as much in the dark as you are as to possible results. At the same time the very satisfactory powers which the British Government has been good enough to vest in me by your hands to-night cannot fail to be of the greatest service in following up such clues as we may have the good fortune to discover."

"There's one thing," added the Solicitor, who was also going to the Paradise of Knaves and Fools on a sort of semi-official holiday, "if M. Trapané has really got anything to work on, and he's hardly the man to be fooled by a canard, the field will be both narrowed and crowded—narrowed as to space and crowded as to possible criminals—if I may put it so, and surely if any definite traces of this cosmopolitan swindle ought to show themselves anywhere it ought to be there."

"I am not without hopes," said Mr. Smith, looking at his watch and rising. "We know, of course, that the flood of the silver tide has set in very strongly towards the 'Tables,' and that much larger quantities are in general circulation than usual. And now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me, I must go. I have a good many scattered threads to gather up and place in other hands before I start to-morrow."

He and the solicitor left the building together and strolled round by the Embankment in the direction of Northumberland Avenue. Though not exactly officially connected, their duties had brought them together on many occasions and, from being professional acquaintances, they had become fast and confidential friends. Arthur Dennison was recognised at the Treasury as quite the smartest of rising men in his department, and, although not quite thirty-five, that is to say, some seven years the great detective's junior, he was nearly always chosen for what appeared to be the hopeless cases—which was the principal reason why he had been asked to select Monte Carlo as a specially interesting place in which to spend his leave.

"If you have half an hour to spare, Dennison," said Mr. Smith, "I should be very glad if you would come with me to the Hotel Victoria. I am staying there at present with my wife and daughter, whom, strangely enough, you have never met though we have known each other so long. I should like to have a little chat with you, and you shall have some music if you like."

Although it seemed a little late to be asked to meet ladies whom he had never seen before, he knew his friend well enough to feel pretty certain that it was not altogether a social invitation, and so, as he had nothing particular to do before morning, he accepted. He knew nothing of Mrs. and Miss Smith beyond

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the fact that they lived almost constantly abroad, chiefly for the purpose of completing the vocal and musical education of Miss Smith.

"Ah, I am glad you can come," said Mr. Smith, "but, stop, I think that is one of my satellites across the road. Will you excuse me a moment? I will overtake you by the Avenue Theatre."

The next moment he had disappeared into the shadows under the railway arch. Dennison walked on and stopped at the theatre to light a cigarette. He had hardly got it well going when a young man of about his own age, fresh-faced and blue-eyed, with a soft hat poised rather rakishly on a very musical-looking mop of light brown hair, came up to him, and, throwing back the cape of his opera-cloak, asked him in very pleasant foreign English if he could favour him with a light.

Dennison handed him a match, almost without looking at him, but to his intense astonishment, when the stranger had lit up he passed his arm through his and said in familiar tones:

"Thanks, and now I am entirely at your service."

Dennison was too well practised at the game to make the slightest sign of astonishment. He took a few slow puffs and said quietly:

"Remarkably well done, my dear Smith, and in excellent time. Your man, I presume, had everything ready. But may I ask why such a respectable member of Society finds it necessary to visit his wife and daughter at a first-rate hotel in other than his proper person?"

"My dear Dennsion," he replied, once more affecting his excellent foreign accent, "I must first ask you to understand that there is no such person as Mr. Stanislaus Smith staying at the Hotel Victoria. You are going to be the guest of Herr Stanislas de Ronski, the not altogether unknown Polish violinist."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dennison, this time fairly startled out of his self-control; "de Ronski—you——"

"Hush, my friend, or, as they say on the boards, we shall be observed. Come along, and the mystery shall be explained to you."

A young man, of foreign appearance, asked Dennison for a light. It was Stanislaus Smith, the detective, admirably disguised.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Double Identity.

If Dennison had had any doubts as to the double identity of his companion while they were in the street, he would have lost them as they entered the hotel vestibule, for not only was Mr. Smith saluted with more than usual deference by the heavily gold-laced porter and his satellites, but the major-domo himself, who happened to be passing across the hall just then, bowed to him with something more than condescension, and said politely:

"Good evening, Herr Ronski!"

A few people looked round as the well-known violinist bowed and murmured his reply to the greeting, and a page-boy came forward to perform the unnecessary task of escorting them to the lift which led to his suite of apartments on the second floor. They hung up their hats in a tiny ante-room, and then Mr. Smith opened an inner door and said, still in his accented English:

"Mr. Dennison, will you do me the honour of entering?"

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A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

He went in past him as he held the door open. It was a snugly-furnished sitting or dining-room of the best hotel sort. His host closed the door and turned the key. Then he went to the sideboard, unlocked a spirit-case, got out a couple of glasses and a siphon of soda, and said:

"And now will you help yourself and excuse me once more, only for a couple of minutes? I will tell the ladies that you are here."

"Of course, my dear M. de Ronski," laughed Dennison, doing as he was bidden. "I hope, however, that you will apologise for my very untimely intrusion. I should be ashamed of myself if you had not made me so deeply interested."

"Which of itself is more than ample excuse, if any were needed," smiled Mr. Smith, as he disappeared through a curtained doorway at the other end of the room.

Dennison took a couple of sips at his whisky and soda and began to walk up and down the room, wondering not a little at the very strange revelation of the last ten minutes or so.

He knew that his friend and semi-colleague was, in his profession, a quick changer of character and appearance; but that he should combine two such utterly different and contradictory personalities as those of the cleverest detective and one of the best-known violinists and composers in Europe, was a trifle hard of belief, even for a man of his very considerable experience.

Presently the curtain was drawn back, and Mr. Smith returned. He still kept his admirable and, thanks to its simplicity, impenetrable disguise, but he had discarded his frock-coat and fancy waistcoat.

So perfectly did he play his part that Dennison had already begun to look upon him, in a certain measure, as a sort of new acquaintance.

"A thousand pardons, my dear friend, for keeping you so long," he said, "the truth is that we start the morning after to-morrow, and the ladies——"

"Yes, of course," interrupted Dennison, "that is just why I ought not to have come in. Naturally, your wife and daughter will be busy with their preparations."

"Pray say nothing more about that," replied Mr. Smith, "and now let us join them."

When Dennison went through the curtained door he found himself face to face with one of the most exquisitely graceful women he had ever seen. She was of medium height, but her perfectly-proportioned figure and the lofty pose of her head made her look almost tall.

Like a great many men who are really excellent judges of female beauty, Dennison never troubled about details. If anything was wrong in feature, carriage, or dress, it struck him instantly as a discord in music or a blemish in a painting would have done. Madame de Ronski, as her husband styled her during the introduction, and as Dennison ever after addressed her, commanded his complete admiration—and there were very few men who would have differed from him.

She might have been anything between thirty and forty, and she was younger-looking than young women of twenty-five. Her clear olive skin was without a wrinkle or a blemish. Her thick hair was blue-black, without a shimmer of silver, and her eyes and lips were still those of the seventeen-year-old Polish school-girl who had fallen in love with her cousin—and his violin—and had lived happily ever after.

During the introduction, another door had opened, and a tall slim figure in white, relieved by a broad belt of gold brocade and a ripple of blue-grey chiffon, flowing from neck to waist, came into the room. Dennison at once recognised her as the daughter of Madame de Ronski, despite the fact that her head was golden-crowned and her complexion as delicious a blending of milk and rose as he had had the good fortune to look upon.

"My daughter Paula, Mr. Dennison," said her mother, moving aside.

He concealed what might have been a visible start by a rather lower bow than usual.

Then he looked for one brief instant upon the most lovely face and into the most bewildering eyes that he had ever seen, and said almost involuntarily—for he was a man who never paid a compliment:

"Your daughter, Madame de Ronski! Surely——"

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Smith, with undisguised pleasure, "so you are going to say what everyone else says, are you! Mother and daughter! Absurd, is it not? And yet Paula is already a year older than her mother was when she made me the happiest man on earth."

"Of course papa could not help saying that," laughed Paula—and Dennison thought that he had never heard such exquisite music in his life. "He always says it when someone gives him the opportunity, but whether he wants to make me out older or mamma younger than our birthdays, no one but himself has ever found out."

"Nor ever will," said Mr. Smith, looking from one to the other with the frankest and most pardonable admiration. "But come," he went on, a little more seriously, "let us sit down and talk quietly, for the subject is a somewhat grave one."

"Very well," said Paula, with a swift glance at the door to see that it was shut. "And now, I suppose, we are going to hear more State secrets. But then, of course, Mr. Dennison is quite accustomed to those things, and so perhaps even you will hardly surprise him."

"I am not so sure of that, Miss de Ronski," said Dennison. "As a matter of fact I daresay that your father could astonish people a good deal more experienced than I am if he chose to."

Mr. Smith sat down in a chair almost facing him, and, with a swift look across the room at his wife, he said, still speaking with his perfect foreign accent:

"I have asked you to pay me this little visit this evening, Mr. Dennison, not only for the pleasure of introducing you to my wife and daughter, but also, as between ourselves, to discuss a little matter of business.

"These ladies," he went on, "are not only my wife and daughter, they are also, if they will allow me to use the expression, my accomplices."

"I beg your pardon, M. de Ronski," said the Solicitor to the Treasury, sitting bolt upright in the chair, "accomplices? Surely that is hardly a term that you would use with reference to——"

"Ah, yes," exclaimed his wife, leaning forward in her chair and looking at Dennison with an expression in her eyes which could not be translated into words:

"You see that we are all conspirators here, but within the four corners of the law. And as my husband has told you, I suppose, we are here in—well not exactly the same character as that in which we are known on the Continent."

"My dear Madame, please allow the rest to be taken as said," he interrupted. "It is, of course, entirely my loss that your husband has not given me this pleasure before, but, like other deferred pleasures, it is all the greater for being deferred. He and I, as I suppose you know, are old friends, professionally and otherwise, and I need hardly say that——"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Smith, "we will also take that as said. You will accept us, that is to say, myself, my wife and my daughter as conspirators, and now I think we may proceed to business."

During the few moments of the silence that came after these few words, Dennison leant back in his chair and looked round the room with raised eyelids, which meant a question.

"I am all attention, M. de Ronski," he said. "I am only here to learn. And now what is this conspiracy?"

"It is this," said Mr. Smith, getting up and putting his back against the door. "I have told you that we are conspirators to a certain extent. I have worked with you officially and unofficially, directly and indirectly, for some years now, and we have got to know each other fairly well."

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"Really, I must say that the balance of the knowledge appears to be on your side so far," said Dennison, "and therefore I am at a disadvantage, because, you see, to all intents and purposes, I made quite a new acquaintance to-night."

As a matter of fact he was rather more at a disadvantage than he thought at the moment, for, as he spoke, Paula's eyes were looking straight into his, and they were not the sort of eyes that a man of his age and temperament ought to look at if he wanted all his wits about him, and so he just added, with a note of interrogation in his voice:

"Yes, and as to business?"

"It is this," said Mr. Smith, turning the key in the door and going back to his seat. "As Stanislaus Smith I have discovered certain facts which by themselves might not have been of any great value. As Stanislas de Ronski, the husband of my wife and the father of my daughter, I have been able, with their assistance, to discover other facts which may possibly, I might say, almost certainly, lead us to something like a definite conclusion."

He paused for a moment and shut his eyes.

"As to the silver problem?" asked Dennison, looking first across the room at him and then into Paula's eyes again.

"Is that not so, papa?" she said, with just a little faint flush of colour in her cheeks. "I think you told us this afternoon that the comedy was developing into tragedy?"

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Smith, getting up again and facing Dennison with his hands clasped behind his back. "There, you see, you have one of the conspirators. Will you tell the story, Paula, or shall I?"

"My dear papa," she replied, "it will be impossible for me to tell it as you could, and even if I could I wouldn't."

"Very well, then," said her father, with his almost womanly laugh, "then I will tell it."

His voice and manner changed instantly. In a moment de Ronski, the musician, disappeared, and Mr. Smith took his place, and he went on in a voice so changed that Dennison for a moment looked up as he might have done if another person had entered the room.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Dennison, that within the last six months or so four murders have been committed in the north, south, east, and west of London, and that the whole police force, including the Criminal Investigation Department, have been absolutely at fault, not only as regards the criminals, but also as to any motive for the crime or crimes."

"I know that," said Dennison, getting up from his chair with something like a jerk, "but surely if this has anything to do with the silver problem, you would have mentioned it this evening at the Yard."

"No, sir," replied Mr. Smith, "that is just what I should not have done, and that is also the reason why I and my wife and daughter are going to Monaco the day after to-morrow. Is not that so, Francesca?"

"Yes, that is so," replied his wife, nodding and smiling as though she was talking about some quite ordinary social event. "Here," she went on, taking a five-shilling piece out of a little silver chain-bag which hung on her chatelaine, "is one of the coins in question."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dennison, as she handed it to him, "then this will be the first authenticated one that I have seen."

He balanced it on the forefinger of his left hand, took a half crown out of his pocket, balanced that on his right forefinger, and rang the two coins. The ring was absolutely true.

"Yes," he continued, "now I see what Sir Edward meant about practical bimetallism. That is just as good a five-shilling piece as they could make at the Mint or anywhere else; possibly a trifle better. It's simply perfect as far as I can see. And now may I ask where that came from?"

"That, my friend," replied Mr. Smith, taking the coin from him and looking almost affectionately at it, "that is one of fifty-seven pieces of different denominations which were found inside the straw mattress on which the man Gunton died somewhat suddenly and mysteriously six nights ago in the three pair back attic in Luton Street off the Caledonian Road; and I could show you a couple of hundred more of equally

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excellent manufacture found in Yeoville Street, Brook Green; St. James's Square, Walworth Road; and Elmer Road, Kilburn."

"What!" exclaimed Dennison. "Why, those are the very places where all these murders have been committed. How is it that our people didn't know about that?"

"Some of them did," replied Mr. Smith, drily, "but not many. It was thought best to let the mystery remain mysterious. You see, we didn't want any newspaper Crime Investigators meddling with a serious matter like this, and so the murders were just treated *as* murders. There was absolutely no clue in any of the cases except these coins, and of course it would never have done for the imaginative reporter to get hold of *them*. It was only to-day that we of the International Police felt at all certain of our ground, and my principal object in asking you to come in this evening was to place the facts at your disposal. It is possible that they may be of some use to us when we renew our acquaintance in Monaco."

"I quite see what you mean," said Dennison, just a trifle touched in his professional pride. "You are perfectly right. It is the worst defect of our system that even official secrets do not remain secrets very long. But I suppose I am at liberty to let the Commissioner have what you have told me?"

"That," said Mr. Smith, looking him straight in the eyes, "is, of course, a matter for your own discretion; but I should be obliged if you would not say that the information comes from me. You see, my position is a rather delicate one. I am not in the employment of the British Government alone, and I could not make a statement like this officially I have given it to you because we are friends as well as fellow-workers, and because I know that you will make the best possible use of it. Personally, and with all due deference to the authorities, I should be inclined to say that, for the present at least, the fewer people who know a thing like this the better."

"In other words," laughed Dennison, "you don't want me to say anything about it. Very well. It's your information, not mine, after all, and I'll hold my tongue till you think it advisable to speak. Meanwhile, I suppose I may take it that you and your colleagues have sufficient reasons for believing that the finding of these coins is more of a consequence than a coincidence?"

"Undoubtedly. You know as well as I do that in the pursuit of the criminal we have to take the law of averages as practically true. This might have happened, possibly, in two of the cases; but in four, improbable. Which means that, for all practical purposes, these four men were agents of the Syndicate, or whatever it is, which is flooding the money markets of the world with illicit issues of coin and notes which have so far proved to be indistinguishable from the legitimate article."

"And, having got themselves suspected of treason, they were got rid of," interrupted Madame de Ronski, looking up from the five-shilling piece which she still held in the palm of her hand. "Yes, Mr. Dennison, I fully believe that in the end we shall find that this is the real explanation. It is, of course, a very terrible thing to have to believe that any man or association of men should have such a tremendous power in their hands; but it really seems to be so. These men were agents who were suspected of the intention to betray their trust, and you know, when great issues are at stake, it is usually enough to be suspected."

"Yes," replied Dennison slowly, "and that is another reason why the less we say about this particular aspect of the puzzle the better. Madame de Ronski, I have learnt more than I expected to do to-night; but, pardon me, is it quite safe for you to carry those coins in your purse?"

"Perfectly safe!" exclaimed Paula, rattling her own chatelaine. "I have some of them here too, and I daresay I shall spend a few to-morrow. And when we get to Monte Carlo, and you make the acquaintance, the real acquaintance, I mean, of your old friend Papa——"

"There is no reason unless Mr. Dennison has another engagement, why he should not do that this evening," said Madame de Ronski, looking across the room at her husband. "Is there, Stan?"

"Personally, I know of none," said Mr. Smith, with a note in his voice which told his guest that, for the present at least he had discussed the problem of the silver criminals and their victims as far as it was possible to do so with profit or entertainment. "Dennison, you thought, I daresay, down yonder by the Avenue Theatre that you had made a new acquaintance. So, in a sense, you did, and now, if you like, Paula shall introduce him to you."

"It would be difficult to tell me of anything that I should like much better," he replied, as Paula rose from her seat and went into the inner room in obedience to a glance from her father. "Mr. Stanislaus Smith, I believe, I know fairly well, but Herr Stanislas de Ronski is still to some extent a stranger to me, and I need hardly say that I shall be only too delighted to know him better."

"Very nicely put!" laughed Madame, as she got up and went to the piano. She sat down and within the next half minute Dennison heard a swift ripple of liquid melody come from somewhere and go to nowhere.

He was not a musical man, but he knew music when he heard it, and he had not often heard such sound-magic as he now heard rippling from the carelessly touched keys. He leant back in his chair, stretched out his legs, and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets.

Paula had brought a very shabby looking violin case into the room and opened it. She took out of it a violin, even shabbier than the case, and gave it to her father.

Then, as it seemed to Dennison, the piano and the violin became wedded, even as his host and hostess were, and Paula, with her eyes alight, crossed the room and said to him in a low, clear whisper which then and long afterwards was to him the sweetest music that he had ever heard:

"Now you shall hear the song of the ocean on the shore, and the murmur of the waves under the moonlight. Listen!"

Their eyes met, and while many unspoken words were passing from soul to soul, Madame de Ronski laid her fingers on the keys of the piano and Mr. Smith drew his bow across the strings of the violin. Dennison shut his eyes and listened, and to him the rest was a dream of blended melodies.

And so he began his knowledge of the new acquaintance whom he had known for so long.

Dennison had no very clear idea as to the numbers which he had heard, and that, as he expressed it afterwards, was the greatest tribute that he could have paid to the perfection of this music.

He listened entranced, for he had never heard such music as this before, and he was almost on the point of starting up from his seat when he looked across the room at Paula, caught a flash in her eyes, and saw her hand uplifted.

The next moment there fell a swift silence—and then something else came from somewhere. He knew that it was only the piano and the violin, but they were now as two kindred souls; they were speaking together in slow and solemn strains, which had a wordless wail of human misery in them.

Madame de Ronski looked round smilingly at him, and her fingers wandered back over the keys. Mr. Smith put up his bow, and Paula rose from the sofa, folded her hands behind her, and, as Mr. Smith drew his bow across the strings, and her mother struck the opening chord, she sang a sweet hymn. Then the wave of melody rose again, and she sang with such pleading emphasis as he had never heard put into words before.

"It is rather curious," said Mr. Smith, laying his violin on the top of the piano, "that such a splendid hymn as that should be the battle-song of the most merciless of the so-called civilised nations."

"Ah, yes, is it not?" exclaimed Madame de Ronski, as she rose. "Mr. Dennison, I am a Pole, and I know, as my ancestors have had only too good reason to know before me, what a ghastly mockery that is. Peace, peace! No, where the shadow of the Russian Eagle's wings falls there can be no peace save that which the sword makes—and that will come to pass when the sword has nothing left to slay."

"Or the Slayer himself is slain!" murmured Paula.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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OUR BACHELOR'S OBSERVATIONS.

It's hard to flatter a sharp girl.

A DEAD love can never be revived.

BETTER be not at all than not be honest.

HAPPINESS is a ray of sunshine between two clouds.

BAD luck generally follows in the wake of bad habits.

CUPID is always shooting and continually making Mrs.

HOW can a woman keep her secrets when her eyes tell tales?

WHEN a man is hopelessly in love it greatly increases his sighs.

IF a young woman bids you take heart, you can probably take hers.

IF you are unable to find an opportunity go to work and make one.

A WOMAN has ideals till she gets married, a man after he gets married.

AN enraged man tears his hair, but an enraged woman tears her husband's.

ALL girls are always looking for an ideal man. Did any girl ever find one?

WHEN a man flatters himself that he knows a woman, he—flatters himself.

WHEN two women talk, the subject of their conversation is conspicuously absent.

SPEAKING of coincidence, it is worthy of remark that kiss, miss, and bliss rhyme.

HOW many people live on the reputation of the reputation they might have made?

IT is easier for some men to talk all day than to keep their mouths shut five minutes.

A LITTLE man should never marry a large widow. He would be the widow's mite.

HALF the men make love to a girl for the sake of talking about it to some other man.

ADVICE would be an awful thing if it were not for the fact that we can take it or leave it.

IF girls don't marry some men for their money, I'd like to know what they do marry them for.

WHEN the accepted lover says "Mine own," he feels a good deal richer than many mine owners.

THERE are occasional moments in every old bachelor's life when he is glad he never married.

ONE woman always pays more attention to what another woman has on than to what she says.

THE wise girl doesn't waste her time on the young man who wastes his time kissing her hand.

WHETHER the child is impudent or clever depends on whether he is your neighbour's or your own.

WHEN you hear a fellow referred to as a ladies' man, you may be sure that none of them want to marry him.

ALL waves are more or less dangerous, but the waves of a pretty girl's handkerchief are usually more so.

THE woman who wears her feathers in her bonnet won't let her little boy rob birds' nests because it is cruel.

WHEN a girl says emphatically that she won't, it is morally certain that she will; when she says she will, will she?

THE truest and best friend a man can have is a wife who does her best to keep him in the straight and narrow path.

LONG engagements are expensive affairs in Russia. The bridegroom is expected to send his *fiancée* a present every week.

WHEN a girl is in love her thoughts are about equally divided between the last time she saw him and the next time he is coming.

A GIRL may say she is surprised when she receives a proposal, but down in her heart she is wondering why the young man waited so long.

A START IN LIFE.

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A Situation Worth £100 a Year

For a BOY. (Parents may help their Son to win).

A Situation Worth £100 a Year

For a GIRL. (Parents may help their Daughter to win).

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The Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a Situation in the Offices of PEARSON'S WEEKLY, THE BOYS' LEADER, &c., and a Salary of £100 a year to commence with, to a boy; and a like Situation and Salary of £100 a year, to a girl.

100 Consolation Gifts will also be Awarded.

These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

SIX QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR EVERY WEEK IN THE BOYS' LEADER.

This is the First Set.

1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British Soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born? Give year and day.*

BEGIN TO-DAY.

Other Sets of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tue day.)

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and the answers to others you will have to search for in books. Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper, numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1 immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it. Anybody may help you, provided you say who. No competitor must be over twenty-one years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears, and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

OUT TO-DAY.

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THE MARK ON THE WALL.

The Story of a Mysterious Omen.

PERSONALLY I think this is a most unsatisfactory story, and I have no doubt many people will agree with me. It is not a ghost story in the accepted sense of the word, for no ghost and no inexplicable noises were seen or heard, but notwithstanding all my efforts, I can find no explanation for what I am about to relate.

"I sometimes wonder if the place is damp and does not suit Edith," said my brother after his first greetings as I stepped out of the train on to the platform of Whitefield Station, "but she was all right the first month we were here, and it is only lately she has seemed so nervous and out of sorts. I am very glad you have come, Claudia; perhaps you will be able to cheer her up."

My only brother had married my dearest friend, and they had settled in a charming house at Whitefield, a tiny village in Kent. This was the first time I had been able to stay with them, for directly after their wedding I had been obliged to go abroad. Now, however, I had come for a long visit, and I was sorry to hear from Percy that Edith was not well. Certainly the place did not seem damp at first sight, and as we approached the house I exclaimed with delight, for I have seldom seen a prettier house than that low white one with its green verandah and gaily-filled flower-beds.

Edith was sitting on the verandah, and as she came to meet us I was startled to see the change in her. She looked thin and worried; every now and then she glanced behind her with a frightened air, and all the time her thoughts were evidently far away from our conversation. Her efforts to appear natural and at her ease were palpable but they were unavailing. My brother looked meaningly at me, and I understood his wish that I should not appear to notice her curious behaviour.

We had tea, and visited the nursery to see what its parents thought the most wonderful baby in the world, a soft little pink-and-white chubby person of about three months old, whom Percy proudly spoke of as "my son," and then I was shown all over the house and garden. Certainly, so far as I could see, there seemed nothing in either the one or the other to account for Edith's nervousness. The house was particularly cheerful, with large sunny rooms and everything planned for comfort and ease.

We spent a pleasant evening, and when I went up to bed Edith came with me and we gossiped together for a long time. At last she wished me "Good night," and was just going when I said on the spur of the moment:

"What a delightful place this is. You must be glad Percy bought it."

In a second the frightened look which had faded from her eyes while we were talking returned.

"It is the only thing he has ever done that I dislike," she said. "I hate this house! I—I—I wish I had never entered it!"

"But why, dear—what is the matter, Edith? You must have some reason. I can't help seeing how ill and unhappy you seem. Won't you tell me?"

"Yes, I have a reason," she said. "Perhaps I will tell you some day, but not to-night. Perhaps you will find it out for yourself. Yes," she continued in a lower tone, as if speaking to herself, "if she notices it, it will prove I haven't fancied it all!"

She departed and I thought of her strange words for a long time before I could sleep. The only solution of them that I could discover was that the house was haunted, but as I had never heard any rumour of the kind, and it seemed about the most unlikely house imaginable to be so, I scouted the idea and waited anxiously for the morning and some explanation.

Percy went up to his office in London every day, and on the morning after my arrival he went off as usual; and after Edith had attended to her household affairs we took our work and went out into the garden.

We talked about all kinds of things, the house, the baby, the place, the news of the day, but Edith carefully avoided all reference to her strange words of the night before. After about an hour she said she found it too hot in the garden, and we moved into the drawing-room. Edith settled me in an armchair facing the fireplace and a door leading into the conservatory. She sat by my side, and I noticed her eyes constantly stared at the wall opposite to us. I looked at the wall myself, and I noticed at once that on one side of the fireplace, just above a small water-colour painting, a piece of the paper had been torn so that the white wall showed. It struck me as curious that Edith, who was the soul of neatness, had not had this repaired, or at least had not hung the picture a little higher so as to hide it. As I looked more carefully at the mark it struck me also as strange that the paper should have been torn off so neatly; the mark was in fact a perfect square about the size of a copy-book. In spite of myself my eyes kept seeking it, and although I knew it must be imagination it seemed as if sometimes it changed colour, not altogether, but as if streaks of a pinkish shade moved up and down on it. It must be the shadow from the curtain, I thought, and I said to Edith:

"What a funny mark that is on the wall. It almost looks as if the paper had been cut away on purpose. I wonder you don't move the picture so as to hide it."

"Thank Heaven!" was her extraordinary reply. "*You* see it, too, then. It isn't all my imagination!"

"Of course I see a mark on the wall; any person not blind must see it!" I answered.

Edith got up from her chair and stood before me. "I am the only person in the house who can see it," she said impressively. "None of the servants can see it, none of the visitors, Percy declares I am dreaming when I speak to him about it. To the eyes of everybody who has been in this room except you and I that wall is entirely covered with paper and there is no mark on it.

"Listen; I will tell you all about it. About a month after we came here Percy and I were sitting in this room one evening, and when I looked up I saw what I thought was a

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shadow on the wall. It was that mark. I asked Percy to look at it and said how odd it was that a piece should have been torn off the new paper like that. He said he could see nothing and that my eyes were deceiving me. At first I thought they might be, but the next day the mark was still there, and there it has been ever since. Percy thought it was because I was not very well just then; and still I see it, and as you see it, too, it proves it must be there."

"What did the doctor say about it?" I asked.

"Oh, he was like Percy and thought I imagined it. He can't see anything either. And as for moving that picture to cover it, it can't be done. I have moved the picture again and again but the mark moves, too, I imagine. At any rate, it is always just above the picture, and I feel sometimes that it will end by driving me mad!"

I did not speak for a moment or two. I am absolutely healthy, I have no nerves, and not a scrap of imagination, and what Edith had just told me seemed impossible. Still, there was the mark without a doubt, and it seemed extraorninary that no eyes but hers and mine could see it.

Edith continued:

"I hate this room! And I never sit in here if I can help it, and I haven't told you quite all now. The mark *moves*. I mean something moves on it, like a shadow going up and down. I am sure it means something horrible, and I am frightened. Oh, Claudia, how glad I am that you have come, and that you can see it, too!"

"I certainly thought I saw something moving on it," I said; "anyhow, there is no use in terrifying yourself over it. It can't hurt us, and all we can do is to watch it carefully and wait for something else to happen."

That evening I asked Percy if he had ever heard anything about the house being haunted.

"Certainly not," he replied. "I suppose Edith has been telling you about the mark on the drawing-room wall. It is only her imagination. Doctor Bourne thinks she wants a change, and I want to take her and baby to the seaside as soon as I can manage it. I believe the shadow from the curtain falls on the wall, and that Edith has thought so much about the mark she fancied she saw that now she honestly believes she sees it. Hallucinations, I am sure, and I hope, Claudia, you will try and get the idea out of her head. No one else can see any mark at all. It is only a fancy of Edith's."

"It is no fancy," I answered, "for before Edith had said a word to me about the mark I saw it and asked her what it was."

Percy stared.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What has happened to you both? I always thought that *you*, at least, were a sensible woman, and now you go and imagine this rubbish!"

"I am bound to believe what I see," I said, "but I am not in the least frightened about the mark, and I intend to try and find some explanation of it."

Percy only laughed.

"You want a tonic as well as Edith," was all he said, as he walked away.

Neither Edith nor I mentioned the mark to him again. It still remained on the wall, and often when we were watching it I thought I saw strange signs moving across it. One day it occurred to me what they were. They were letters, blurred, misshapen, and many of them only half-formed. I suggested to Edith that we should write down all the letters we could make out, and when we did this we found that they formed a sentence:

"Beware of journey twenty-first July."

"It must mean that something dreadful will happen on that day!" said Edith, and I agreed with her that the words were a warning, but for whom or against what I could not imagine. We decided not to tell Percy what we had discovered for he regarded the whole affair as a phantasy of our brains. However, one good result ensued from our making out the sentence; the mark disappeared, and we were no longer worried by seeing it each time we entered the

What Clever Folks Eat.

PROVERBS, even when untrue (which is rare), are invariably at least based upon truth. "What is one man's meat is another man's poison" was said so long ago that no one knows the origin of it; but its accuracy is proved by the different fare preferred by various celebrities.

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace finds fish diet best for brain work.

Mr. G. B. Shaw is a vegetarian.

Mrs. Langtry prefers plain fare, and little of it.

Mr. George Gissing would like to be a vegetarian, but confesses himself unable to live without meat.

Mr. R. G. Knowles eats rich food, pastries, &c., and drinks ice-water, yet declares himself well and happy; while Mr. Hall Caine owns to being "a constant martyr to all the troubles that attend diet," but neglects to tell us what he eats.

Well, well, we are not all cast in one mould, that's clear. How all the world must envy Mr. Knowles, while forced to adopt for itself Mr. Hall Caine's description!

And yet ability to digest rich foods is nothing but what should be the attribute of everybody; as it invariably is of people who fortify their digestive organs with an occasional dose of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. In that way one can ensure the healthy action of the liver, a plentiful supply of pure blood, and freedom from constipation and all the other pains and penalties which are summed up in the one word—indigestion.

Though Mr. Robert Duffield is devoted to agriculture, and has lived all his life in one of the healthiest counties of England, he has not escaped the universal complaint. "My trouble was indigestion," says Mr. Duffield. "I had no appetite, and became listless and unfit for work. Food caused me pain and wind in the stomach. A constant feeling of bilious sickness at last turned to violent fits of vomiting, of which I would sometimes have three or four in a day, which reduced me to a state of trembling, like one with the ague. A private doctor giving me no hope, I went into hospital for five weeks, where my condition improved a little; but I had no sooner come out than I was as bad as ever again. After I had suffered for five years, a friend advised me to try Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. Then my relief began. Soon afterwards all my ailments left me, and I returned to work. My health has ever since remained good, though I am now seventy-four."—(Signed, Robert Duffield, Letheringsett, Holt, Norfolk, August 28th, 1903.)

The diet of clever folks differs as greatly as their abilities. But that which makes any wholesome diet possible to everybody is always the same, and its properties are unrivalled.

A Thirsty Soldier.

EIGHT shillings for half a pint of water! This enormous price was paid by a soldier while marching to Khartoum to relieve Gordon. Could it possibly be worth the money? The soldier says that it was, for it revived him when his tongue was parched and his lips swollen from thirst. Though eight shillings so greatly exceeds the price, it is not more than the value of a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup, which restores the tortured dyspeptic to health and ease.

Mr. A. E. Sharpe, of 17 Spencer Road, Seven Kings, Ilford, says: "Indigestion and the troubles it gave rise to—heart-palpitation, headache, nervousness, loss of appetite, &c.—made my life wretched, and reduced my weight from 12 stone to 8 stone 6lb. I could not sleep at night and would get up in the morning feeling as weary as when I went to bed. I had no heart to work and would sometimes have to leave off and sit down on my stool, a prey to melancholy. My nerves were so shattered that I dreaded the railway journey to and from the City. Nothing benefited me until I took Seigel's Syrup. That is the medicine which cured me and restored me to my former self."

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drawing-room. Sometimes we spoke about it to each other but we were so relieved at its disappearance, and the date mentioned was so far away (this being only the middle of August), that by degrees we forgot about it, and by the time I left Whitefield Edith was her old bright, cheerful self, and had almost forgotten all the terror she had suffered.

Well, the winter passed away and summer came round again, and Edith invited me to go and stay with her again. Even returning to Whitefield did not recall the events of my previous visit to my mind. We had so much to talk about, and the baby was so charming now that he was beginning to walk and talk, that nothing else seemed worth consideration.

Percy was going away for the week-end to stay with some friends at Richmond. He would return by his usual train on Monday afternoon. I think I shall never forget that Monday. It was a glorious summer day and we stayed in the garden all the morning with the baby. After lunch Edith suggested that we should rest in the drawing-room as it was really far cooler than the garden. We provided ourselves with books and settled ourselves in the two most comfortable chairs. I suppose the heat made me drowsy, for I fell into a doze from which I was roused by a touch on my arm. Edith was standing by my side, staring, livid-faced, wild-eyed, speechless at something on the wall behind me. I turned, and saw—the mark again. In an instant everything came back to me, but before I could speak Edith's voice sounded, hoarse, strangled, from her pale lips.

"Claudia, this is the day—Percy—he returns to-day. 'Beware of journey twenty-first July,' it said. I shall never see Percy again, I am sure!"

She broke down utterly and sobbed, while that horrible mark looked down at us with the words now standing out clearly on it. This was the twenty-first of July, and Percy was the only person we knew likely to be journeying on it.

The necessity for action roused me. My first idea was to go off to London myself, but there was no train till five, and by the time I reached Charing Cross Percy would be in the train on his homeward journey. Besides, though I hated to think of it, the warning words might apply to me.

I consulted the "A. B. C." The train he always came by was an express, leaving Charing Cross at six and arriving at Whitefield at twenty minutes past seven. Then there was a slower train leaving at half-past six and arriving at half-past eight. This was the last train of the day.

"We must wire to Percy not to come home to-night," I said.

Edith only cried on.

"He would take no notice," she said. "If we wired that without any reason he would naturally take no notice, and if we gave the reason he would still come because he would think we were mad. You know, when you were here last summer, he always declared we imagined the mark. No, he will be killed, I know; there will be some accident to the train. I shall be a widow to-night and that precious baby fatherless!"

She wept hysterically.

"Don't be silly, Edith!" I said sternly. "It is no good to behave like that. We must *do* something, and to wire to Percy is the only thing we can do. I will go to the village now and send a telegram."

I went and dispatched a message to Percy, begging him, "for a good reason," to spend that night in town, although I had but little hope he would take any notice of it. Nor was I wrong, for a reply came from him, saying: "Expect me by usual train; do not understand your message."

Then, indeed, we despaired. Edith gave way utterly and kept urging me to save Percy, to do something. I did not see that there was anything I could do. Occasionally I went into the drawing-room to see if the mark were still there, but there was nothing to be seen, and I tried to think that the whole thing was a horrible dream. Finally I went to the station to meet the six from London.

It arrived safely, but Percy was not in it.

"He missed it, I suppose," said Edith hopelessly; "but it makes no difference. He will come by the next and be killed just the same."

But I felt more hopeful. Warnings are not always infallible. One train had arrived safely, why should not the next? The time for the next train to arrive came and passed, the time it would take Percy to walk the two miles from the station came and passed, but he did not come. We could not hear from him for the telegraph office closed at six. I suggested going to the station again, but Edith would not let me leave her, and the two servants objected to walk down that lonely road at night either singly or together.

That was indeed a night of horror. We feared we knew not what; at one moment we professed to think the whole episode of the mark on the wall nonsense, at another moment we felt it must be a true warning. We invented excuses for Percy being kept all night in town; we alternated between hope and fear. The hours dragged on, the morning broke, and as the clock struck six I heard the click of the garden-gate; up the path came Percy, safe and well. Before he could open the front door we were with him, and in the first joy of seeing him whole and unhurt we forgot to wonder how he had arrived at that hour, for the first London train did not reach Whitefield till half-past eight.

"I came by a special," he said. "I couldn't get here sooner because the line was blocked. I couldn't wire as the office here is shut and I knew you would be anxious. You have heard, of course?"

"Heard?" Edith echoed. "Heard? We have heard nothing. What has happened? Oh, Percy, how thankful I am that you decided to obey my telegram in the end. I am sure something would have happened to you if you had come last night. The mark——"

"But I didn't obey your telegram," he interrupted her. "I thought you were two silly, fanciful women, and I intended to come by my usual train as I wired to you. But at the last moment, just as I was leaving the office an old friend of my father's turned up unexpectedly, and I had to see him. Then I made for the six-thirty. I got in a block and was delayed some minutes and the office clock must have been slow, for I reached Charing Cross in time to see the last Whitefield train steaming out of the station. Was it Providence, I wonder, or what? I stayed at the Morgans for the night, and it was only very early this morning I heard what had happened. The six-thirty met with an accident and ran off the line and——" He paused.

"Was anyone hurt?" I asked quickly.

"If I had been in that train you would never have seen me alive again, I think!" he answered. "There was only one first-class carriage, and every passenger in it was killed!"

* * * * *

Now, can anyone explain this story?

Claudia Ashton.

STONEBROKE: "Do you think your father would object to my marrying you?" Heiress: "I don't know. If he's anything like me he would."

EDITH: "Is it true that you are engaged to Jack?" Mabel: "Yes, but you are not to mention it. I'm not quite sure that Jack knows it as yet."

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Catarrh Claims New Victims Daily.

It is estimated by the medical profession that more than one half of all diseases are produced by taking cold, that is by an acute catarrhal condition. Unfortunately, this truth is not generally recognised. The victim of a cold looks upon its symptoms as merely a temporary affair, and in the majority of cases the cold is allowed to linger on until it assumes a chronic state. The chronic cold becomes chronic catarrh, silently and insidiously producing general weakness and often attacking the lungs, stomach, liver, or kidneys in the course of the disease. A very thorough treatise on this subject, together with much good advice, is contained in the last *Review of Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases.* With the *Review* is also included a "Supplement" describing the success of a new treatment in such a large number of different forms of catarrh that everyone can find something of interest. A free copy of this medical work can be obtained post free by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10, Marble Arch, London, W. With the *Review* there is also a Report Form, by means of which anyone can obtain free advice by post. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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Badly Expressed.

"Ah," he protested, "my love for you is the greatest thing in the world. It is larger than the world. It is wider than the sea. Let me pour it into your ears?" "Sir!" ejaculated the fair maid. "Do you mean to insinuate anything about the size or shape of my ears?"

She'd Make Sure of That.

Miss De Pride: "I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man on earth!" Rival Belle: "Indeed you wouldn't! I'd take him myself then!"

In High Society.

May: "Do you think one should marry for love or for money?" Chaperon: "My dear, love is an excuse for marriage, but money is a justification."

How Beautiful 'Twould Be!

"I'm going to hug you!" he cried. "Forewarned is fore-armed, you know." "Four-armed?" she murmured, blushing vividly. "Would that you had been forewarned!"

Obstacles in the Way.

Harry: "Blanche says she has insuperable reasons for remaining single." Horace: "Yes, I know what they are." Harry: "Then she has told you?" Horace: "No; but I have seen her."

She Was a Girton Girl.

He: "Darling, name the day!" Blushing Maid: "I regret I cannot, as it is already called 'Wed-nesday,' derived from the Saxon 'Woden'; I shall, however, be happy to designate a date."

To Arms!

"You have had some experience with the fair sex," said the inexperienced youth who had been jilted; "what is the best way to get round a girl?" "With your arms!" tersely replied the old-timer.

Nothing Very Extraordinary.

Bertha: "Sometimes you appear really manly, and sometimes you are absolutely effeminate. How do you account for it?" Harold: "I suppose it is hereditary. Half my ancestors were males and the other half females."

Edgar Eagerly Entices Edith.

Edgar: "Miss Edith. I—er—have something most important to ask you. May I—that is——" Edith (softly): "What is it, Edgar?" Edgar: "May I—Edith, would you be willing to have our names printed in the papers with a hyphen between them?"

Easily Removed.

"Do the girls here really affect men's clothes to any great extent?" inquired the tourist. "Oh, no!" replied the gallant native. "No? I thought they did." "No. Of course, a little complexion powder or rouge may stick to a fellow's sleeve occasionally, but that could hardly be said to affect the clothes."

Would Not Be Quite Proper.

"Can we squeeze in here?" said the young man with the red necktie, as he and his young lady got into the well-filled omnibus. "Well, I 'specs you kin if you want to, master," replied the man from the country, "but I'm thinking it would look a trifle better if you reserved that mark of affection till you reached the girl's home."

Far Worse.

Wife (bitterly): "You deceived me when you married me." Husband: "I did more than that—I deceived myself."

He Was Thunderstruck.

He: "You are the first girl that I have ever loved." She: "Darling, I believe you!" He: "Heavens! You are also the first girl that ever told me that."

Her Candid Opinion.

He: "Do you think a fellow ought to be locked up for stealing kisses?" She: "No-o, hardly. But I think he ought to be tied up." So now they're engaged

More Jealousy.

Miss Passay: "Yes, and when he proposed, I tried hard not to let him read any encouragement in my face, but he did." Miss Peppery: "Ah! I suppose he could read between the lines."

Then There Was Trouble.

Mother: "So you enjoyed your walk, Kate? Did you go all that distance alone?" Daughter: "Oh, yes, mamma, quite alone!" Young Brother: "Then, how is it, Kit, you took an umbrella out and brought back a walking-stick?"

Naturally!

Miss Uglymug (an heiress): "Mr. Cashunter, you are the first man who ever kissed me in my life. Do you believe me when I tell you this?" Her Affianced: "Believe you? Well, I should say so." And now the engagement is declared off.

An Objection Overruled.

Miss Hockheimer: "No, Mr. Pinkenbergh, I am sorry, but I cannot marry you. I could never love a man with red hair." Mr. Pinkenbergh: "Dot vas notting. My barber tells me dot at der rate my hair is falling oudt I vill be completely bald in one year."

Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder.

"While my daughter was playing the piano last night a strange man stopped at the door and asked to be allowed to give her half a crown." "Was he such an ardent music-lover?" "No; he said it was merely a thank-offering because he didn't live next door to us."

George Didn't Keep His Promise.

"George said he'd die if I didn't marry him." "And still you refused?" "Yes. I wished to find out before promising whether he really loved me as much as that or not. Oh, Harriet, I'm p-p-perfectly miserable. He seems to be wretchedly healthy, and I d-do love him so much."

It Really Meant "Evelyn Cavendish."

Angelina: "That was a lovely engagement-ring you gave me last night, dear; but what do those initials, 'E. C.' mean on the inside?" Edwin (who has bestowed the ring before, and had it back): "Why—er—that is—don't you know that is the new way of stamping eighteen carats?"

They Were Only Minor Indications.

"Has my daughter, sir," demanded the stern father, "ever given you reason to think she would listen to a proposal of marriage from you?" "Well," said the young man, twirling his hat in his hand, in an embarrassed manner, "except that she calls me 'darling,' and always kisses me when I bid her good-night, I can't say that she has."

He Was Used to Being Dunned.

Ethel: "Oh, Tom, what a pity it is you are not rich! They say that some of these millionaires don't dare to leave the house for days at a time, because they receive threatening letters, saying that something dreadful will happen to them if they don't pay the writer sums of money." Tom Hardup: "Pooh! Why, I get plenty of such letters."

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EPPS'S
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And take no other.

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Send us an envelope (stamped and addressed), and you will learn how to remove permanently all superfluous hair FREE OF CHARGE. (Send no money).—Address, in confidence, CABILLUS MFG. CO., 57 Century House, Regent Street, London, W.

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There is a cure for Drunkenness which has shed its radiance into thousands of hitherto desolate homes. It does its work so silently and surely that while the devoted wife, sister, or brother looks on, the drunkard is reclaimed, even against his will or without his knowledge or co-operation.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Cool Love Letters.

"My lover," writes "BEATRICE," "writes very cool love letters. He seldom tells me anything but just news, and yet, when we are together, he is very affectionate. Do you think this coolness in writing letters means that he is only a little bit in love with me?"

* * * * * * *

Not necessarily. Many men are not clever enough to express their feelings in writing, while others—those of the plain, practical, common-sense kind—dislike writing their thoughts, but prefer to express them. Trust your lover, and judge by his personal actions, not by the tone of his letters.

Breaking an Engagement.

I AM very sorry, "E. R.," that you have had to break off your engagement. But as you say your late *fiancé* indulged in bad habits, such as drink or gambling, you were, no doubt, quite right to let the affair drop. If the influence of a woman is not sufficient to take a man from such habits during courtship, it is scarcely likely to avail after marriage.

* * * * * * *

As to presents and letters, yes, it is usual to return them. The ring should, of course, be returned. As to the letters, it is a matter of choice whether you return them or destroy them. Ask the man if he would like to have them back. As to your other question, I should certainly advise you not to see him if you can possibly avoid it. As you have definitely made up your mind to cease your relations with him, it would be better not to resume it on the basis of an impossible acquaintanceship.

The Fair Stranger Again.

"ON my way to business," writes an anonymous correspondent, "I invariably meet in the train a young lady. I am anxious to speak to her, but am at a loss to know how to do so. I see her five times a week."

* * * * * * *

I should avoid wishing to speak to strange, unprotected young ladies in a London railway carriage. Certainly I cannot advise you in such a matter. If a man is fortunate enough to strike up an acquaintanceship with a girl through meeting her in a train, it must be due to some mutually expressed desire to know each other. If the girl to whom you refer wishes to know you, and could do so without embarrassing herself, probably she will give you an opportunity to speak to her. But I cannot advise you to make overtures to her. If that kind of thing were regarded as correct, there is no knowing to what attentions young ladies might not be subjected when out by themselves.

In Doubt.

"I HAVE been meeting often a young man who treats me with every respect, and says he could never love another girl as he loves me. I like him very much myself, but know very little of him. We met at a party. He is twenty-seven, I am eighteen. Would it be right to listen to him?"

* * * * *

As you were introduced to him at a party, I suppose you have some means of finding out something about his position and character. If you are satisfied, then I should just act as my own feelings dictated. As you like him, then give yourself every opportunity of improving your acquaintance with him. Do not be afraid because he is several years older. Twenty-seven and eighteen are very good ages for a match

An Unreturned Sentiment.

"DAISY" writes: "Some weeks ago I met a young man at a party, and we walked home together. I fell in love with him. Since that he has not written to me, or given me any reason to suppose that he wished to resume our acquaintance. On the evening in question, however, he was most attentive. Well, acting on the advice of a friend, I wrote him a letter on the pretext of wanting to know somebody's address. I thought he would reply by saying he hoped to see me again. Instead of that, however, he merely gave me the information, and wrote an ordinary polite letter. How would you advise me to again hint to him that I wish to know him better?"

* * * * *

You had better let the matter drop, "DAISY." You did quite as much as a girl should to give him an opportunity of writing to you in the needfully tender strain, and as he did not take the chance offered him, you must conclude that he is not so eager for the friendship as you are. No girl should let it appear that she is angling for a man, as that lessens his respect for her, and, in some cases, men have been known to take advantage of a girl's admiration without serious intentions. These things lead to heart troubles, and should be avoided.

Love versus *Song.*

"ROMANY" has a lover. She also has a voice. The two have lately run rivalry for "ROMANY'S" attention. She is a member of a chapel choir and a choral society, and sings a great deal at concerts and "socials." This takes up four of her nights a week. Her young man does not object to her singing in the chapel choir—as why should he?—but draws the line at the other functions which take so much of "ROMANY'S" time. "ROMANY" is willing to give in, but does not want to offend the people who ask her to sing.

* * * * *

Well, I think your young man has a good deal of right on his side. Four nights a week is a great deal of time for any girl to give to singing, unless she does it for a livelihood. He has a right to claim that you should give more time to him, as you are to be married in a year. Besides, you will have to give up some of your engagements then, and if you must offend your friends in any case by withdrawing from their concerts, it might be as well now as then. At the same time, I do not see why you should not occasionally give them your services. It is a very nice accomplishment for a girl, and should not be dropped. But I think your lover is right when he objects to a steady four nights a week given to it. Try to reduce the number.

Cynthia

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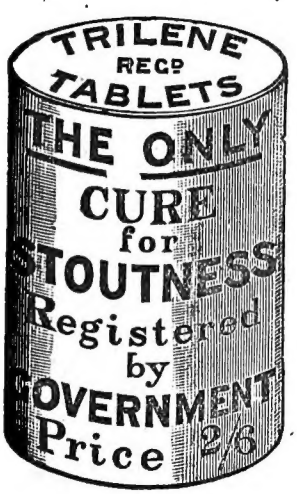

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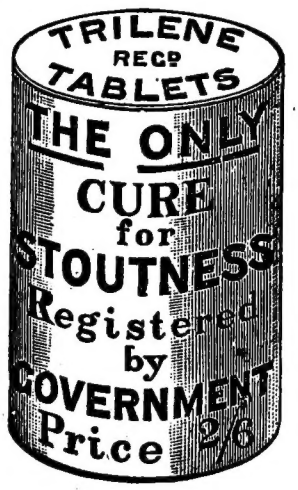

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 13lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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